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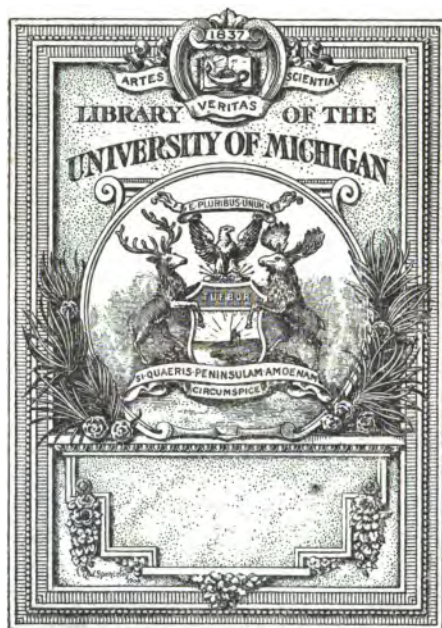
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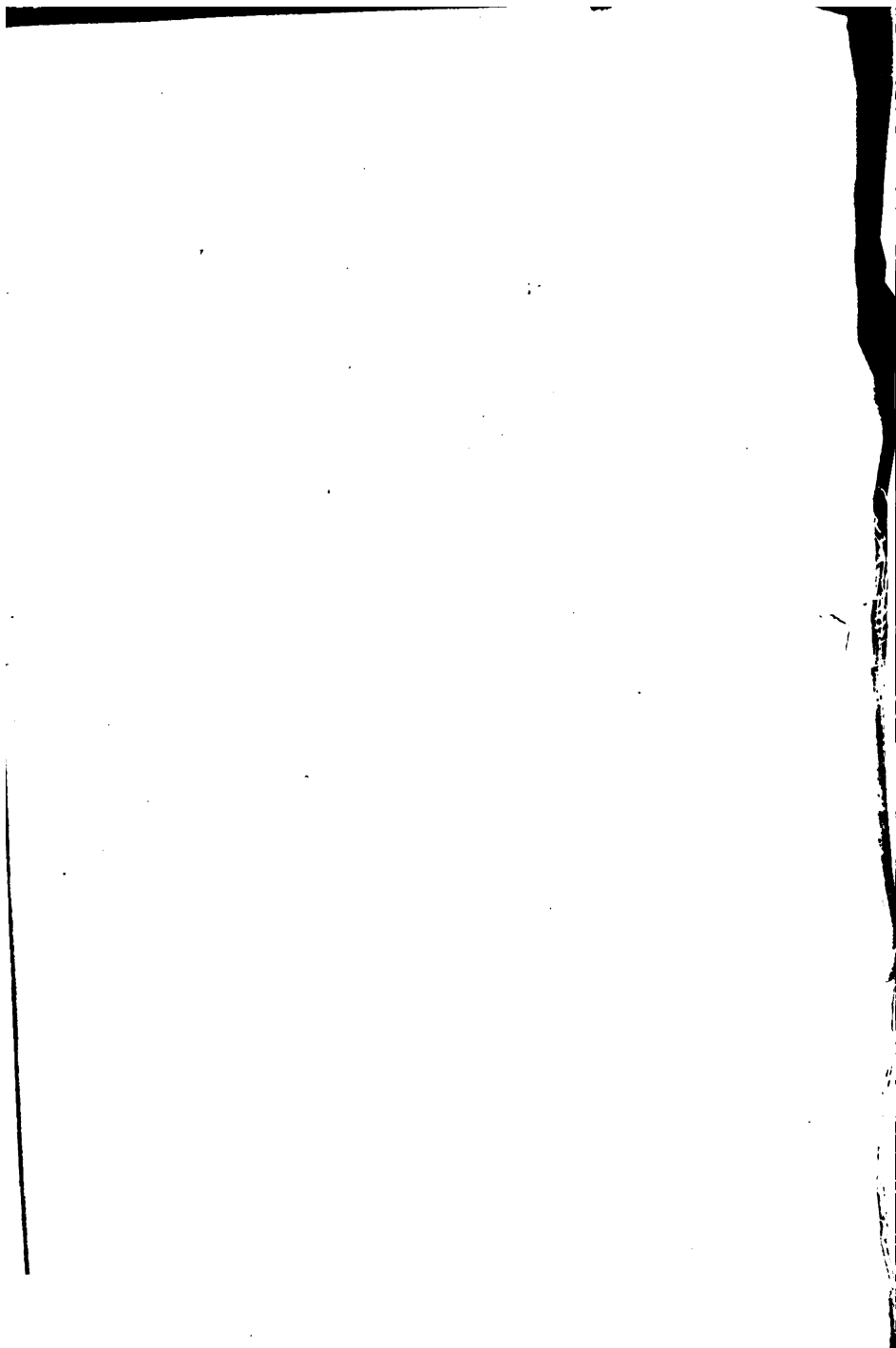
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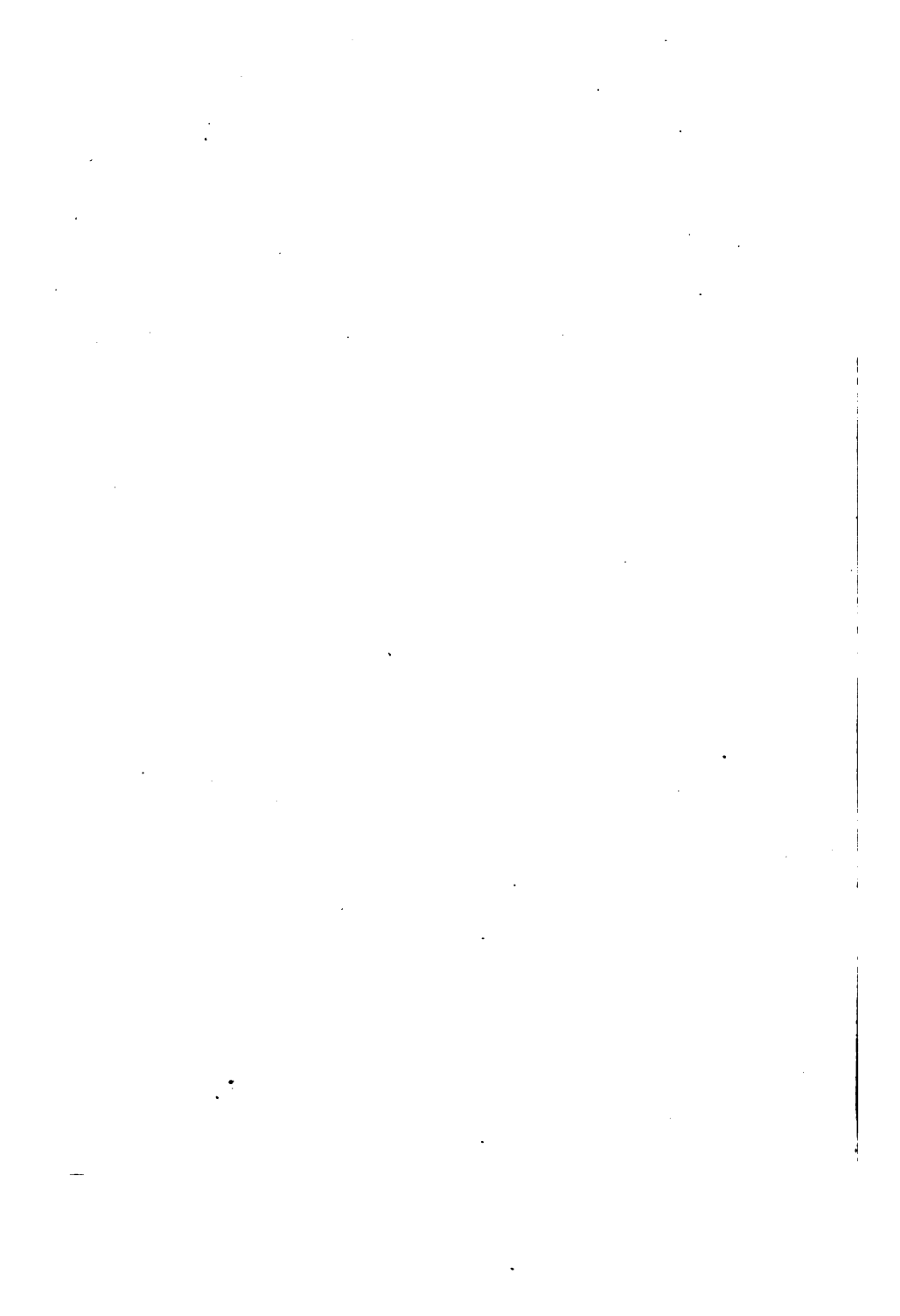
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THE STORY OF HELEN DAVENANT.



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HELEN DAVENANT.

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BY
VIOLET FANE,

AUTHOR OF "DENZIL PLACE," "SOPHY, OR THE ADVENTURES OF A SAVAGE,"
"THROUGH LOVE AND WAR," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE STORY OF HELEN DAVENANT.

CHAPTER I.

THE day that followed upon this eventful morning was, I think, one of the most anxious and restless that I ever remember to have passed. I cannot say that it was also the most miserable, because I found it impossible, as yet, to take a serious view of my husband's situation. The words of the detectives had certainly stunned me for the moment, but upon recovering from the first effects of the shock, I began to derive consolation from the very enormity of the

charge, which I felt assured must be altogether without foundation. I could not help longing, however, to be convinced of this from Hugo's own lips, or, at least, by a letter from him, and when the posts were all in, and there was still no news, I felt terribly feverish and anxious.

We had lingered on at Monte Carlo, upon the previous day, with our eyes fixed upon the door of the hotel, through which we expected that Hugo would eventually pass out and rejoin us. He did not come, however, and by-and-by we felt the chill which always precedes the sunset upon the Riviera, and knew that it was time for us to take our homeward way. We went into the hotel to collect our cloaks and wraps before departing, but could see no sign of Hugo or of the men who had arrested him, and feeling convinced that the whole thing was merely a provoking blunder, we thought it

would be wiser not to call attention to it by asking questions, which might have the effect of associating my husband's name, after everything had been satisfactorily explained, with some unpleasant affair. Fortunately, Sir Harry seemed to have observed nothing. He fancied that the Prince had fallen in with some acquaintances in the gambling-rooms, and urged us to return before twilight, leaving him to follow us at his own convenience.

And, indeed, during the whole of that evening I was on the alert, listening for his well-known footstep, but the evening had darkened into night without word or sign of him, and now the day that followed had gone by too, and still no news!

Miss Warden, who had always been one of Hugo's warmest admirers, whilst agreeing with me that some sort of foolish comedy of errors was being enacted by the police,

which would be cleared up quite satisfactorily in the course of a few days, was much concerned for Hugo's comfort and well-being in the meantime. He had none of his things with him, she said. If we had only known where he was we might, at least, have sent him off his dressing-bag and a few changes of raiment by his servant. It was even possible, she thought, that he might be dragged all the way to Russia in order to be confronted with his accusers. There was no telling, in fact, to what inconveniences he might not be subjected! In our most desponding moments I think that this was really the gloomiest form assumed by our fears—that the Prince might have to take a long and cold journey unprovided with railway-rugs, clean shirts, or ivory hair-brushes.

During the watches of an utterly sleepless night, I had arrived at the conclusion that

my husband's arrest must be connected, in some way, with Zoubiroff, and before day-break I had succeeded in establishing a whole chain of circumstantial evidence in support of my theory.

Zoubiroff, I said to myself, had probably committed some crime, or had associated himself with dynamiters and assassins. I had never liked the man's expression of countenance, and it would not have surprised me in the least to learn that he had turned out to be a thorough scoundrel. He had evidently been arrested in Paris at the time of his mysterious disappearance, and conveyed to Russia, where it would have been quickly discovered in whose service he had been living. Either Hugo's presence was required at the trial of his servant, or else, through the access which Zoubiroff must have had to many of the papers of his master, something might have been found

in his possession which, for the moment, had seemed to implicate the Prince in his valet's conspiracy. The officials who had arrested Hugo at Monte Carlo might have obeyed their instructions without having been made acquainted with all the particulars of the case, and hence they had stupidly associated the master with the crime which had been committed by the servant. Something of this kind had evidently occurred, and knowing nothing whatever of the laws relating to the extradition of political offenders, I made up my mind that the crime, whatever it was, was, of course, an "*affaire politique*."

Thus, woman-like, I proceeded with my ignorant conjectures, until I had almost persuaded myself of their truth. I told Miss Warden in the morning what conclusion I had arrived at. The same idea, she said, had occurred to her own mind—that the arrest

of the Prince was due to his former connection with Zoubiroff. The Prince's papers, she felt sure, would be confiscated by the police. My letters to him, it now occurred to us, would, in all probability, be taken away with the rest of his correspondence. The secret of our marriage, which he might now be desirous of concealing for the present, would be liable to become bruited abroad. I knew that he had preserved several of my letters, if not all that I had ever written to him ; and I knew, too, that it was his habit to keep them in a small, locked silver casket, in one of the pockets of his travelling-bag, which used to stand upon the floor, under the dressing-table, in his bedroom. It would be the simplest thing possible, I thought, to go through the box-room, open the travelling-bag, and abstract this casket. Hugo was not accustomed to lock his bag with a key. It opened with a

spring, the secret of which was known to me; and, once I had obtained the letters, I would keep them until my husband's return. All this would be simple enough. It occurred to Miss Warden, however, that once we were in Hugo's bedroom, it might be to his advantage, perhaps, if we removed, likewise, all the loose papers we could lay our hands on; to be returned to him, of course, as soon as this annoying investigation was over, when he could but be grateful to us (we thought) for our promptness of action in preventing his private correspondence from being overhauled by strangers. We decided upon this course at about eleven o'clock in the morning, and went at once into the box-room with the intention of acting upon it. Before trying the handle of the door, however, we thought it prudent to listen, and hearing distinctly footsteps in the inner chamber, we cautiously retraced our own.

Hugo's French valet, we concluded—who probably knew nothing of what had occurred—was, no doubt, setting his room in order, in anticipation of his return. It would be wiser for us to wait for another hour, when the servants would all be engaged downstairs with their mid-day meal.

Soon after twelve o'clock we made our second attempt. It was unsuccessful as the first. The door of Hugo's room was locked upon the inside, and when, going round to that which opened upon the now deserted corridor, we mustered courage to try the handle, we found that this door also had been secured. We were baffled; but, upon reflection, could only attribute our disappointment to the praiseworthy caution of Hugo's servant. Whether our marriage was declared just now or not, this man would have, probably, to be taken into our confidence some day. Miss Warden pro-

posed, therefore, that we should send for him, upon some pretext, as soon as he had finished his dinner, and beg him, in the interests of his master, to assist us now. Acting upon this suggestion, I rang the bell, but was informed by the waiter who answered it that the Prince's valet had left the hotel early in the morning in consequence of a telegram which he had received. We were completely at a loss as to what to do after hearing this; and thinking that it might not be discreet as yet to institute any further inquiries, we could only await with impatience the course of events, hoping and praying for the best.

Next morning, as I was wandering about the public reading-room, like an unquiet spirit, making a pretence of dipping, now and then, into the books and newspapers which were littered about upon the tables, the waiter who was accustomed to serve us in

our sitting-room, and who had informed me on the previous day of the departure of the Prince's valet, came towards me, and, bowing respectfully, placed a folded newspaper in my hand. It was a small local weekly journal, still damp from the press, and not thinking at the moment that it could contain anything of particular interest, I unfolded it listlessly, and ran my eyes carelessly over its two coarsely-printed sheets. By-and-by the following paragraph met my bewildered gaze:—

“ *Un incident des plus sérieux vient de jeter la consternation dans notre ville*” (I will proceed with the paragraph in English, because, being an Englishwoman, I had to translate it, as it were, mentally, into my native tongue before I could grasp its entire significance), “which might incline us to believe that the well-known axiom, to the effect that the most atrocious murders

end by being unveiled and punished, is in a fair way of being verified, in a startling and unexpected fashion, even after the bones of the unhappy victim, undiscovered for years, have become reduced to dust by the hand of Time. *Monsieur le Prince de C.....*, belonging to one of the most ancient and highly-considered families in Poland, *aide-de-camp* to His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Russia, a *ci-devant* captain in the *Chevalier Gardes*, &c. &c. &c., and well-known and esteemed in Paris, and in most of the capitals of Europe—finding himself, quite recently, at Monte Carlo, was breakfasting there in company with some ladies, when he was suddenly arrested under their eyes, and accused of a crime of which the details are at once tragical and revolting. We will restrict ourselves, for the present, to these facts, whilst awaiting the further particulars which we expect to receive very

shortly from St. Petersburg, whither, it is said, the Prince was immediately conveyed, under the escort of two of the most intelligent agents of the Russian police. Let us hope that the result of the forthcoming investigation may be to reinstate His Highness in the estimation of the public. We will only add, for the benefit of our lady readers, that the accused is young, handsome, accomplished, and a bachelor."

Before I had finished reading, the words had begun to swim before my eyes. What new horror was this—this tale of "unhappy victims," "mouldering bones," "tragical and revolting crime"?

I remained standing with the newspaper in my hand, without any consciousness of the flight of time, till, feeling sick and faint at heart, I staggered to the door with an effort, and made my way, more dead than alive, to our own apartment.

CHAPTER II.

A WEARY period of suspense followed upon this dreadful day, during which I heard nothing whatever of my husband. I accused Miss Warden of abstracting and hiding away the newspapers, as I was never able to find any further allusion to the paragraph I had already seen. She assured me, however, that she had searched every day for some elucidation of the terrible mystery, but always in vain. If the newspapers referring to the Prince's arrest had been withdrawn from the reading-room, it must have been, she said, by the orders of the

landlady ; who might not be desirous of calling public attention to the fact that she had so recently harboured a person resting under such a dreadful accusation beneath her roof.

Miss Warden begged me not to cross-question any of the inmates of the hotel, assuring me that if the worst came to the worst—although this she was very far from foreseeing—my chief aim and object in future should be to conceal the fact that I had ever been in any way associated with one who was guilty of such a revolting crime. Only four persons, as yet, had been informed of my marriage : Mr. Collingwood, Miss Warden herself, Mason, and Zoubiroff. Upon *three* of these, at least, I felt that I could confidently rely ; and who knew whether Zoubiroff, the only one of the four whose devotion to me was as yet unproved, was even now in the land of the living ? Hugo, then, might pass out of my life as

entirely as if I had never met with him; and I must endeavour to drive from my mind the remembrance of my brief and unfortunate marriage!

“But, dearest Helen,” she would generally conclude by exclaiming cheerfully, when we had been discussing these gloomy subjects, “surely something must tell you that this is nothing more than a provoking mistake! How could that kind, amiable creature—who wouldn’t hurt a fly—have committed a murder? Some day, when you and I are seated here, I feel convinced that the door will suddenly open, and the poor dear Prince will walk in, just as if nothing had happened.”

My kind friend intended only to cheer and console; but her words produced upon me, in my nervous and shattered state, a totally opposite effect, and I found myself watching the green velvet *portière*, which

shrouded the doorway in painful and agitated expectation.

Did I really desire the return of Hugo at this time? I can scarcely say, even now, when the fleeting years have done so much towards softening the sinister impressions of the past. Of course I most earnestly desired that he should be proved innocent of the charges preferred against him. It was hardly possible, indeed, in my least sanguine moments, whilst remembering his gentle temper — his kind, sad smile — the spiritual and intellectual cast of his mind — to believe that he could have placed himself, by his acts, upon a level with the lowest and most ferocious of criminals. And yet I had, at times, felt as though he was irrevocably separated from me by something mysterious and inexplicable. Why, with all his rare and attractive qualities of mind and person, had I — one of

the most impressionable of women—who had longed unconsciously since my earliest childhood for human sympathy and affection, never been (for I recognised this now) wholly and unquestioningly in love with him? What sinister influence was that which had seemed to arise—whenever I had felt tempted to surrender myself to the tenderer and warmer emotions—and forbid me at my peril to pour out my whole soul in oblation? Did not this warning voice—or whatever it was—partake, perhaps, of the nature of a presentiment? and might not some terrible crime—staining indelibly the soul of one of two persons—tend to prevent that perfect sympathy which ought always to exist between a wife and her husband, even supposing that the crime in question was alike unsuspected and undiscovered—before “the bones of the unhappy victim” had been brought to light?

These thoughts, crowding upon me against my will, filled the days with misery and mistrust.

Disloyal as it may appear—after all the proofs which I had received of Hugo's kindness of heart—one terrible conviction haunted me perpetually; the conviction that, through some mysterious combination of circumstances, of which I was altogether ignorant, he was, in truth, guilty of the crime imputed to him. Do what I would, this idea clung tenaciously to my mind; and so, at this miserable period, I think the only real consolation I derived from Miss Warden's hopeful words was inspired by the thought that one day, perhaps, my marriage might be even as though it had never been; and that Hugo himself might become like one of the vague and shadowy creations of a passing nightmare.

It was fortunate for me that my father,

being such an invalid, did not observe the change which had taken place in my spirits and appearance. I was not inclined, just now, to pay much attention to such trifles myself, but was made aware that I looked ill and wretched by the anxious attentions of Mason, and by the frequent inquiries respecting my health with which Miss Warden was overwhelmed by the proprietors and visitors of the hotel.

I felt, indeed, an utter prostration of mind and body such as I had never experienced before. The circumstances in which I found myself were, certainly, new to me also, but I had fancied, until all this came to pass, that Providence meted out to us, with our misfortunes, the courage necessary to endure them with fortitude and resignation, and I despised myself for falling so far short of the heroines of history.

We were beginning now to think of our return journey to England. "The voice of Spring was echoing through the land;" through the beautiful land—that is to say, in which we were sojourning. The violets were over, but hundreds of later blossoms were flowering forth in their stead upon every side. The pink almond-trees were all in bloom, and the tenderer green of young leaves newly unfurled contrasted harmoniously with the sombre foliage of the olives, whilst the ruined grottoes in the old garden were almost smothered with white and yellow Banksia roses. The double row of cypress spires which formed our noble avenue, towered heavenward to meet the very bluest of blue skies. A long spotted snake glided one morning across my path, to my infinite terror—a certain harbinger, I was informed, of summer—and, gradually, the hotel omnibus con-

veyed away every British subject, until we were almost the only visitors left in the place.

"The last of the French *chefs* has taken his departure this morning," Miss Warden remarked, shortly after my meeting with the snake; "there were three here when we first came, and no end of *marmitons*. I don't think that your father, in his delicate state, will be satisfied with the talents of a very dirty old Nizzard woman, who has just arrived here, as cook. The head-waiter is going away to-morrow, and the *concierge* the day after. If we don't start next week we shall be driven away whether we like it or not."

This was no more than the truth. In spite of the delightful weather and the solace afforded to my troubled spirit by the deserted condition of the hotel, the sense that we could no longer abide where

we were in peace had become almost atmospheric. The few remaining attendants regarded us with wonder not unmingled with reproach. The "season" was over, and they were impatient to depart elsewhere. We decided, therefore, to start for England early in the ensuing week.

CHAPTER III.

ONE afternoon, a few days before our intended departure, as I was waiting in our sitting-room until the day should become cool enough to go out, I was startled by a sharp knock at the door; the *portière* was flung aside, and a waiter came towards me with a visiting card upon a tray. Some one from the town of Nice, he said, who wished particularly to see me upon business.

My heart began beating violently, and my eyes seemed suddenly to cloud over, so that I found it impossible to read the name upon the card. I connected it instinctively with

Hugo. The waiter was a stranger, who did not know him by sight. Perhaps he had returned, as Miss Warden had always foreseen that he would, and, fearing to startle me by his too sudden appearance, had sent up his card to prepare me for his coming.

My emotion, however, was soon dispelled by the waiter. The lady was in her victoria, he said; could I receive her now, or would I have the goodness to appoint some other hour?

So it was only a "lady" after all! Yes; certainly. I would receive her now. I begged the waiter to show her up at once.

My heart ceased its tumultuous beating, and my eyes recovered from their blindness. I looked at the name on the card, and read—not without some return of my former emotion—

“MRS. MARKS,

Hôtel des Anglais.”

I had not got over my astonishment when the door opened, and the waiter ushered in this unexpected visitor. I saw before me a tall, well-dressed woman, with an unmistakeably Hebrew cast of countenance, but of a refined and intellectual character, altogether unlike the vulgar, sensual types which are sometimes seen amongst the lower orders of this remarkable people. Her face was thin and haggard, and her large clear-cut black eyes were surrounded by dark circles. She was breathing hard from the exertion of coming up stairs. Hugo had told me that Mrs. Marks was in very delicate health, and she certainly looked like an invalid.

I motioned her to a chair, and as soon as I could recover my voice, begged to be allowed to help her off with her cloak, which was very heavy considering the heat of the weather. She unfastened it at the throat, and flung it carelessly on to the sofa. I

observed—being in that dazed and bewildered state when, oddly enough, trifling details seem to rivet one—that she was what would be termed “very handsomely dressed,” *too* handsomely, I thought, for an ordinary afternoon visit. I was conscious of a good deal of ruby velvet, richly trimmed with black lace and jet, and of a diamond brooch which twinkled in the sunlight. On her arm she carried a small bag with a silver clasp.

“I hope I’m not intruding,” she began, as soon as she had recovered her breath. “I am come upon very particular business indeed, and as I am not at all in good health—my chest is delicate—I had to wait for one of my favourable days, and was unable, therefore, to make an appointment beforehand. Besides which, I was not going to trust anything to paper, as what I have to say is quite private and confidential. Have I the pleasure of speaking to the Princess?”

Her words, uttered in a high and somewhat metallic voice, were altogether a surprise to me. I had realised—in spite of my bewilderment—as soon as I read the name of my visitor, that this must be the wife of that Mr. Marks who had taken Hugo's place in Poland upon a lease, and who was said to be desirous of eventually purchasing it "out and out." My husband had told me that she was passing the winter at Nice, and it was even strange, perhaps—as she was a person of somewhat showy appearance—that I had never seen her before. But what could this woman, whether she was the wife of Mr. Marks or not, know of my private history, and of the marriage that I was each day more anxious to keep a profound secret?

Before I could reply to her question she continued—

"I haven't alluded to your husband by name, because I wish to be extra discreet,

but you will know whom I mean if you are the lady I take you for. You may have heard that Mr. Marks—my husband—has lately rented the house and property of a certain Prince in Poland, and that he has been residing there recently ?”

I murmured something to the effect that I had already heard this.

“Then,” said my visitor, “you’re the lady that I wanted to see. Now, I daresay you wonder how I came to hear of your marriage ?”

“Yes,” I answered faintly, “we did not want any one to hear of it yet; I am surprised at your knowing.”

“You look so delicate,” said Mrs. Marks, “that I’m afraid of upsetting you if I tell you too much; but it must all come out sooner or later. In the meantime, I have a letter for you.”

“From my husband ?” I gasped, over-

whelmed by emotions too complex for me to attempt to describe.

"No," replied my visitor, who was now searching in the depths of her hand-bag, "the letter is not from the Prince—I don't expect he will have permission to write for some time—but it's a letter I have been asked to deliver into your hands. Mr. Marks promised the writer that it should reach you as soon as possible. I hope it won't give you a shock."

I assured her that suspense was agony to me, and that I would rather hear the worst than remain a moment longer in my present state of miserable ignorance.

Mrs. Marks hereupon handed me a letter sealed untidily with red wax. I looked anxiously at the direction: "To the Respected and Honourable Miss Davenant." The handwriting was evidently that of a foreigner. It was small, cramped, and

entirely unfamiliar to me. With trembling fingers I broke the seal, and read as follows :

“ HONOURABLE AND RESPECTED LADY,

“ Being, in the first instance, accused of complicity in the affair which has now become transferred entirely to the Prince, my former master—in consequence of some body-clothing which he had given me, long since, having been discovered in my apartments in Paris ; and which had upon them, unhappily, some evidences of the unfortunate catastrophe — I was arrested some months ago, and interrogated by the police. My private correspondence, all my papers, &c. &c., fell also into their hands, and through this circumstance they were enabled, in the course of their interrogations, to lead me to suppose that they knew already all the details connected with the

murder; and also that *Monsieur le Prince* was married. I should have divulged none of the particulars connected with these two occurrences if I had not supposed that *Monsieur le Prince's* accusers were already in possession of the chief facts; and so I am sending you, madame, this letter with my profoundest respect, to assure you that you can retain the confidence you so graciously reposed in me, and which it has always been my endeavour to merit; and that, kissing your hands, I beg leave to remain, with humble and respectful duty, your highness's faithful and obedient servant,

"ZOUBIROFF.

"(Formerly *valet-de-chambre* to *Monsieur le Prince de C.*)"

After reading this letter I was even more painfully bewildered than before.

"I'm afraid I've upset you dreadfully," I heard Mrs. Marks saying—when I could hear at all—"but, you see, my husband promised this man that his letter should reach you. It was difficult enough to get him permission to write, as he is still under arrest. With Russian officials, however, money works wonders."

"I can understand nothing," I said, at last; "I have been told nothing. Why am I left in this miserable state of suspense? What has happened? Of what is my husband accused? Where have they taken him to? I implore you to tell me everything you know; however dreadful it may be, I have a right to hear it!"

I suppose that, without meaning it—for no woman could have felt more humbled and abased than I did—I had assumed a tone of authority, having become emboldened by despair. Mrs. Marks seemed

as if she was about to comply with my entreaty. She coughed nervously, and shifted the position of her hand-bag. My perceptions appeared to have become quickened by misery. I fancied that I perceived the reason of her hesitation.

"You think," I said, "judging very likely by your own feelings towards Mr. Marks, that I care so much for my husband that it would kill me to hear anything against him. But, no! I can assure you it is this suspense, this terrible mystery, that is slowly killing me! If I look ill, this is the reason; I was always very strong before. Indeed, indeed, I would far rather that you told me everything!"

But Mrs. Marks still hesitated.

"I have received no authorisation from Mr. Marks to do more than give you this letter with my own hands," she said, "and this I have done. I can't say whether my

husband is aware that you know so little. Perhaps he may think it better that you should remain in ignorance until after the trial. You look scarcely strong enough at present to stand a shock. However, if you wish it, I will communicate with Mr. Marks, and ask his permission to tell you all I know."

"But Mr. Marks is in Poland, or in Russia," I exclaimed, in despair, "a letter will take such a long time reaching him, and his answer is sure to arrive after we have started for England!"

"Then I can telegraph," said Mrs. Marks, an expression of pity coming into her somewhat hard eyes, "and if he answers 'yes,' I can call again and tell you the whole story. It's a regular case of 'murder will out.'"

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" I cried, overcome with gratitude. It seemed to me,

at the moment, as if this woman had granted me some long-sought favour.

Mrs. Marks readjusted the clasp of her bag, and rose to depart. I helped her on with her cloak like one in a dream. As she bade me good-bye, it occurred to me that, but for my having become aware that Zoubiroff had been concerned in Hugo's accusation, I knew no more than I did before.

"Tell me one thing before you go," I said, therefore; "do not be afraid that you will do me harm. Of what is my husband accused, and who are his accusers? I was near him when he was arrested, and I heard him say to the man who had hold of him that he supposed he was taken up for a political crime. The man answered; No,—that it was for '*un assassinat*'—a murder. But there are many different kinds of murder. I think now that he must have become

mixed up in a plot to get rid of some public person—some tyrant, perhaps—from a wish to benefit mankind, even at the risk of his own life. This would be a murder, of course, if he had really planned any one's death. But, however mistaken, however guilty he may be, this would not seem to me quite like a common murder. Men have done such things, sometimes, from the highest motives."

Whilst I was speaking I had worked myself up to believe that my present conjecture was the true one. Our feelings are greatly influenced by comparison; and when contrasted with my previous emotions of horror and repulsion, I regarded Hugo now as almost an innocent and injured man.

But I was destined to have my illusion rudely dispelled.

"I would much rather have waited until I had heard from St. Petersburg," Mrs.

Marks said ; “ but, as you seem so anxious to know the worst, it may be cruel to keep you any longer in suspense, for you *must* hear all about it later on. I can assure you, my dear madam, that it wasn’t a murder with anything fine about it ! My husband is your husband’s accuser. The Prince murdered Mr. Marks’ only brother very nearly fourteen years ago, who had, unfortunately for himself, married your husband’s sister—Madame Dobrowolska—one of the worst women in the world ; and, if there was any motive for the crime, beyond cruelty and family pride, it must have been done for money, as the poor victim had just taken a large sum out of the bank with the view, it was said, of purchasing an Italian title, and none of this money has ever been heard of since. I can quite believe that you can’t care much about such a fellow ; still, it’s all very distressing for you. Mr. Marks only

took the place in Poland in order to try and discover his brother's body, which he had beheld in a dream, all covered over with rubbish in a cellar."

CHAPTER IV.

I WILL not attempt to describe my feelings after the departure of my unexpected visitor. I could not have done so at the moment, and now that Time, the great physician, has partly healed

“The wounds that others strove to bind in vain,”

I would rather not dwell, more than will be necessary for my story, upon my past sufferings.

The reply to the telegram sent by Mrs. Marks came sooner than I expected. She received her husband's permission to tell me

everything. He advised me, however, for my own sake, to behave as if I knew nothing until after the conclusion of the Prince's trial. He promised also, at my request, which reached him through his wife, not to call attention to the subject of my marriage, which could in no way influence the ends of justice, and that if, in the course of the proceedings, it should be brought to light, to furnish no clue which might lead to my identification as the wife of the accused. These assurances were not all conveyed to me within the narrow compass of a telegram.

A letter to Mrs. Marks followed upon her husband's message. She read me passages from it upon the occasion of her next visit, and I was favourably impressed by the writer's apparent consideration for my feelings.

It was during this visit that she revealed

to me the circumstances which had led to the Prince's arrest.

I did not learn, however, until later, many of the minuter, though not less important, details, but it is difficult for me to remember, now, the precise order in which they were brought to my knowledge.

To avoid confusion, therefore, I will simply set down a history of the facts, and to this end it will be necessary for me to revert to a period when Hugo Crecszoleski's existence was utterly unknown to me; when he was, in fact, a young man of barely nineteen, living in a far-off land, and when I was a little girl of only four or five, beloved, at that time, of tender parents, inhabiting the dear old nursery at Northover Park.

How strange, how fascinating, would have been the notion, to a romantic and imaginative child, such as I soon came to

be, that some being, with whom I had never yet been brought into personal contact, was waiting, waiting—in his ancestral castle,—for the irresistible influence which was first to launch him on his way towards me, in obedience to the irrevocable decree which went forth at the very beginning ! How I should have thought about this beautiful foreign Prince whilst I was playing with my bricks upon the nursery floor, and dreamed of him as I lay at night sleeping in my little cane-sided cot, and with what curiosity and impatience should I not have looked forward to the moment when the days of probation should be overpassed, and when he would stand before me in the flesh and claim me for his bride !

Alas ! with all the materials, as it seemed, which usually go to the making of a happily-ending romance, to what had my existence now turned ? To one of

shame, disappointment, and humiliation ! The man I had sworn at the altar to love, honour, and obey, was now a prisoner, accused of a horrible crime ; and were his innocence to be proclaimed, now, from the house-tops of every city in Europe, I could not be quite certain that, after the terrible shock I had received, he would ever occupy his former place in my esteem. Our affections, like our beliefs, are not entirely under our own control ; and suspicion and mistrust, once they have thrust their way, uninvited, into the human heart, are not very easily exorcised. When a person we have esteemed and respected suddenly presents himself before us in an utterly unfamiliar aspect, the very constancy of our nature seems to compel us to repudiate him, in order that we may remain faithful to our previous impression. To care at all for this unexpected new-

comer would seem like an infidelity to the man who is now no more. But to proceed with my story.

Some years previous to the time to which I have just alluded—the time when Hugo was only a youth, and I little more than a baby—there lived in the Jewish quarter of a foreign city two brothers, named Bernhardt, the sons of a wealthy and respectable merchant of the Hebrew persuasion. The brothers were twins, and from their earliest years the deepest attachment had existed between them. During their boyhood they had scarcely ever been separated, having been educated by a learned rabbi under the paternal roof; but, as they advanced in wisdom and in years, their father exhorted them to make a choice of a profession. Mark—the elder of the two, as far as it is possible for a twin to claim primogeniture—elected to follow his father's example and

embark in commerce; whilst Maurice, the younger one, who was of a more scientific and inquiring turn of mind, devoted himself to the study of medicine and philosophy. Upon the death of their father, his large fortune was equally divided between them, and as at about this time the Hebrew population of their native town began to be subjected to all kinds of annoyances and oppressions, they resolved to separate for the first time and to pursue their different callings elsewhere—in some place where their property and their liberties would be likely to be more secure.

When, however, the time for their separation drew near, both the young men fell a prey to an unaccountable melancholy. As is sometimes the case with twins, so intense was the sympathy existing between them that they often experienced sensations which were identical. There had come to

them, likewise, from their fathers something which was nearly allied to the gift of prophecy, a vague consciousness of what, to most people, lay still shrouded in the obscurity of the future, and which had asserted itself more than once upon important or critical occasions. Hence both Mark and Maurice were alarmed at their own sadness, each feeling apprehensive for the safety of the other. Finally, however, the voices of reason and of worldly wisdom triumphed over these vague fears. Some cousins of their father had long been established in London as merchants and financiers. Mark, who had been named after the head of this family, had been invited to enter into partnership with them, and had devoted himself in consequence to the study of English. The opening was altogether too advantageous for the young man to refuse. Like another Abraham, therefore, he departed

from his native land. He went straight to London, where he eventually married one of his English cousins—the lady from whom I learnt nearly all these details—became a naturalized British subject, and in a comparatively short time acquired a vast fortune.

Almost every year he made projects for revisiting his native country, and the brother to whom he remained tenderly attached. But, somehow, these projects seemed doomed to be invariably thwarted. Sometimes it was his business that stood in the way of his plans; or else his health, or that of his wife, rendered the undertaking of a long journey out of the question. Then, again, Maurice had written, upon one occasion, that it was his intention to come to England to visit Mark. This visit, also, was destined never to take place. Maurice decided, instead of it, to make a tour in

India ; and this tour, planned in the first instance, to last for only a few months, was prolonged, as it happened, for very nearly two years. In a word, strange as this may appear to those who have not realised the mutability of all human intentions, twenty-five years elapsed since these devoted brothers had unwillingly torn themselves apart, during which time they never once beheld each other. Days, weeks, and months seemed to fly past so quickly. Life in London, particularly a business life, is so full of care and responsibility ! When Mark looked back upon the years that had gone by since he first came to England, they seemed to him to have been scarcely longer than the same number of weeks !

The career of Maurice, in the meanwhile, had not been less successful. Unlike his brother, he had decided not to quit the land of his birth. He had migrated, however,

to another town, where his religious opinions were not known, and where, whilst remaining faithfully attached to the traditions of his race, he refrained, from political and prudential motives, from identifying himself with the Jewish community. The name of Doctor Maurice Bernard—for now he had discarded the original manner of spelling his name, as calculated to recall his Hebrew descent—soon became famous in medicine. But he devoted himself, also, to more recondite mysteries. He had studied mesmerism as a curative agent, and had thoroughly familiarised himself with the physical and mental phenomena which it is capable of producing.

His own peculiar faculty of “pre-vision,” as Mrs. Marks called the prophetic power of which he was still conscious from time to time, attracted him to the study of clair-

voyance in all its strange developments, whence he was led to the investigation of spiritualism in its various forms. He had even made experiments in black and white magic, and had constructed a laboratory in order to discover whether the alchemists' dream of transmuting the imperfect metals to gold possessed aught of truth in it or no. In the Middle Ages it is quite possible that Dr. Bernard's taste for the occult might have brought him to the stake; but in these more enlightened days his reputation for mystic learning, combined with his irreproachable moral character, earned for him the respect and admiration of his friends, whilst distinguished strangers, from all parts of the world, who were interested in the same subjects as he was, were in the habit of thronging to consult him upon the strange matters with which he had rendered himself familiar.

When Mrs. Marks had arrived at this point in her narrative she paused, as though uncertain as to whether she ought to go on with it.

"I now come to the time," she said, "when Dr. Bernard first met with the Prince, your husband. Can you bear to hear my story to the end?"

I assured her that, in my present state of hopelessness and despair, nothing could well add to my misery, and that I would far rather know the whole truth, in order that I might consider what I had better do.

Thus encouraged, my visitor proceeded with her story, which I will endeavour to set down, as far as I can remember, in her own words.

"Prince Crecszoleski," she said, "was living quite alone at this time, his sister having been lately married to a Polish General. I believe he had just entered the

army, but being a young man of very studious habits, who had inherited a large estate and a fine fortune, he was enabled to obtain a good deal of leave from time to time, which he spent in prosecuting all sorts of odd spiritualistic inquiries. He was interested in the same subjects as Dr. Maurice Bernard, and soon became one of his most enthusiastic pupils. The town at which the doctor now resided was not more than a few hours' journey from Prince Crecszoleski's country-house, so that he was enabled to pay frequent visits to the laboratory. The two enthusiasts became, apparently, the closest friends, and the doctor used to stay for weeks together at the Prince's place—a large, rambling, ill-kept barrack, from all I have heard, but just the very spot, from the loneliness and seclusion of its situation, for the investigation of secret mysteries. After a while, the two

friends decided to visit India, the Prince obtaining from the Emperor permission to travel, in order to complete his scientific and philosophical studies, on condition that he should return at once to his military duties should hostilities break out between Russia and any other Power. During this time my husband heard very seldom from his brother. From what has since come to his knowledge, however, through Zoubiroff, the Prince's servant, who accompanied them, they seem to have gone through all sorts of hardships and privations, fasting and abstaining from drinking even water, at times, in order that they might share the ecstasies and marvellous experiences of the wonderful Indian mystics and ascetics. They remained in India for nearly two years, and after their return the doctor's letters to his brother were all dated from the Prince's *château*. The two seemed, in

fact, to have become almost inseparable. But it turned out that there was another attraction for the doctor besides the society of his pupil. The Prince's only sister, having been recently left a widow, came to spend the first year of her mourning in the seclusion of her old home. She was a good deal older than her brother, who was not more than twenty at this time, and had always possessed great influence over him. If there are ever, now, such creatures as witches, I verily believe this woman must have been one of them ! She seems to have been able to cast her spells over a man in a minute !

“Dr. Bernard, who had never looked at a woman before, as far as we knew, fell almost immediately in love with her. My husband soon discovered from his letters that some new and disturbing influence was at work, but little thought, at this

time, how matters would end. I suppose that she must have been wonderfully handsome. She could not, then, have been more than thirty, and Mr. Marks, who saw her quite lately in Paris, says that she is wonderfully handsome still.

“How and when Dr. Bernard’s marriage with this wicked woman took place we never knew for certain. As far as we can make out, it must have been about a year from this time. Some may wonder, perhaps, why this lady—young, beautiful, and accustomed to the society of persons altogether different from this steady and serious professor—should have consented so soon to re-marry. We cannot say what may have been her private reasons, but we have heard since that, during the life-time of her former husband, who was quite an old man, and allowed her her way like a spoilt child, she had led an existence of great extra-

vagance and dissipation in Paris, where she was surrounded by flatterers and admirers. The character she bore there was none of the best, and we were informed (for my husband left no stone unturned in order to discover all about her) that the man she had set her heart on—a person in a very good position—did not come forward to marry her, as she had expected, as soon as she became a widow. Disappointed, perhaps, at this, she may have married the doctor out of pique. Or, had he discovered, during his travels in India, some way of making people fall in with his wishes through the aid of magical spells?

“Perhaps the simplest explanation may be that Dr. Bernard had become extremely wealthy, and that rumour made him out even richer than he really was; for, with the shrewd business habits peculiar to his race, he had not neglected his worldly

interests whilst occupying himself with spiritual affairs. Mr. Marks has heard, too, that the lady was a confirmed gambler, and very deeply in debt, and he thinks that she may not have liked to make any further calls upon her brother, who had already paid away large sums for her. We have found out that, previous to the marriage, she had borrowed money from the doctor. Be this as it may, in an evil hour they were married . . .

“Why did not Dr. Bernard’s prophetic instinct warn him against so rash an act? He was in love—I suppose this accounts for his infatuation; and in love, too, I verily believe, with a sorceress, who must have been in league with the Prince of devils. The doctor did not avow his marriage for some time; telling us afterwards, for excuse, first, that the lady had married him unknown to her brother, and that, hence,

he had not deemed it right to inform his own relatives until he had confided in those of his wife ; and then, when Mr. Marks at length knew all, the doctor desired that he would not reveal his kinship until he had broken to his wife the secret of his true origin. This he had not yet ventured to do, as the Jews were despised and execrated throughout the dominions of the Czar. In a little while, he said, he should inform her from what race he sprung, as it was not his intention to separate himself from his own people.

“So about two years went by, and then, quite indirectly, it came to our ears that the learned Dr. Maurice Bernard was no more. My husband, deeply afflicted at the news, immediately set about collecting all the information he could relating to the manner of his brother's death, and to the disposal of his body, which he feared might

not have been interred in accordance with the Jewish ceremonial. He was ignorant as to whether Dr. Bernard had, previous to his death, revealed his race and religion to his wife, and he felt it necessary, therefore, to proceed with the greatest caution. He thought that he might possibly learn more, under the circumstances, if he abstained from making his inquiries in person, and finally decided to send off to Poland a trusty and confidential agent, a member of the legal profession, of the same persuasion, and originally, of the same nationality, as himself, and who was conversant, therefore, with the language of the country, and with the law, as it was applied to the property of deceased Hebrews. This gentleman was to find out, in the first instance, if Dr. Bernard had been buried according to Jewish or Christian rites, whence we should be able to discover

whether he had avowed the faith of his fathers or passed away as a renegade. As it turned out, however, there seemed to have been no body to bury! My husband's emissary returned with the following strange story:—

“Dr. Bernard, so he had been informed, went out one day upon a wolf-hunt, accompanied by the prince, his brother-in-law, with whom he appeared to be upon the best of terms. In the course of the afternoon the two hunters became separated. The weather was intensely cold, and the prince, failing to obtain any answer to his shouts, was supposed to have come to the conclusion that the doctor had returned to the *château*. He was not there, however, and the search that was made for him as soon as day dawned, upon the following morning, had proved unsuccessful. A week passed, and, as he did not appear, his wife and her brother began to apprehend the worst. The

spacious forests surrounding the castle were infested by wolves, and it was more than probable that the doctor had been attacked and overpowered by these ferocious animals, rendered desperate by hunger. His gun, battered and blood-stained, as though it had been used in self-defence, was said to have been eventually discovered in one of the most secluded recesses of the forest, together with a few tattered shreds of his hunting-coat and some bones. The snow, however, had fallen in large quantities since the day of his disappearance. When it melted further discoveries might be made, but there could be no doubt whatever but that the doctor was dead, for, had he been still alive, he would most certainly have returned to his wife, to whom he was represented as having been devotedly attached, and to whom he had bequeathed all his property.

“With this strange story my husband’s emissary had to content himself. There

seemed, indeed, nothing more to be said. Mr. Marks, however, was not so well satisfied. Do what he would, he could not banish from his mind the notion that his brother had been the victim of foul play. And yet, what could he do? For a member of our community to level accusations, in the absence of direct proof, at a powerful scion of the aristocracy, could be productive of nothing but disappointment in a country where the greatest hostility prevailed towards the Hebrew race. After thinking the matter over, therefore, my husband decided that he could do nothing but wait in patience for any fuller revelation which might be vouchsafed to him, whilst keeping himself informed, through a faithful old servant of his family, who still lived in the city of his birth, of the movements of Prince Crecszoleski and his sister."

CHAPTER V.

“AND now,” said Mrs. Marks, “before I go on, I must inform you of a circumstance which happened many years before; something that will make you fancy, I’m afraid, that we’re a people plunged in all sorts of ignorant superstitions! I feel bound to allude to it, however, on account of the strange events which followed upon what seemed, at first, to be a thing of no consequence. The destruction of Bithar, however, as we Jews are taught to believe, all came from merely pulling up a young cedar tree!

“When the twin brothers parted for the first time, each one presented the other with a gift—a talisman, supposed to be endowed with all kinds of extraordinary virtues, and which was always to be worn upon the person as a protection from harm. I don’t suppose you know anything about the teaching of our rabbins or of the old legends which are to be found in the Talmud? One of these tells of the adventures of King Solomon the Wise with Aschmedai, the Prince of devils. The king is said to have been much tormented by this evil spirit, who, assuming his own likeness, even penetrated to the apartments of his wives, keeping on his slippers, however, in order that they might not see that his feet, in common with those of all devils, were like the feet of cocks. Solomon, however, was himself a magician, and was finally enabled to overcome and defy the demon.

This victory he achieved partly by the aid of charms and incantations, and partly by the wearing of amulets upon which some of the great magical names were engraved, and which were said to preserve their possessors as well from the malice of evil-minded men. Two of these very amulets, worn once upon the person of Solomon the King—or so, at least, my husband and his brother believed—had descended as heirlooms in their family, and had been worn and treasured by their forefathers from generation to generation. Each of the young men became possessed of one of these charms at the death of their father, and these, at parting, they exchanged one with the other, vowing that they should never leave their persons as long as they lived. The talisman that passed thus to Mr. Marks consisted of a three-cornered piece of bloodstone, engraved upon one side with mystic characters, the meaning of which

we have never been able to ascertain, and having, upon the other side, numbers which are supposed to correspond to one of the texts of the Babylonian Talmud before it was arranged under the six 'classes' or 'orders' by the Rabbi Juda. This talisman, being too large for a ring, had been put into a case, and mounted with thick gold chains, in order that it might be worn as a bracelet. It has never left my husband's arm since I have known him. When he dies I am to take it off, if I survive him, which is not very likely, and give it to our eldest son. Before all this was explained to me I fancied that it must have been a keepsake from some woman ! . . .

"Dr. Bernard's talisman, it seems, was almost exactly like that worn by his brother, except that it was larger, and had upon it a somewhat longer inscription. It consisted, likewise, of an engraved piece of blood-

stone, enclosed in an outer case, and mounted on chains which were long enough to go round the neck, and it was as a necklace that the doctor used always to wear it, hidden away under his clothes, so that it might not be observed.

“Now, when my husband sent to Poland to discover all that he could respecting his brother’s death, he gave instructions to his agent to make particular inquiries about this talisman. He begged him to inform Prince Crecszoleski and his sister that it was a family heirloom, and requested that if found it might be delivered to his messenger, so that one relic, at least, of his departed brother might pass into his possession. In reply to these inquiries, Madame Bernard stated that she had seen the ornament in question, and knew that the doctor was in the habit of wearing it. It must have been upon him when he was attacked by the wolves,

and might possibly be recovered when the weather enabled the keepers to make a more effectual search in the forest. If so, it should be forwarded at once to my husband's agent in London.

“The loss of this family relic was quite a blow to Mr. Marks. (I call him by this name because—about two years after the doctor's disappearance—my father died, and, upon succeeding to his business, my husband dropped his former name, and traded forthwith under the name of Marks.) He seemed unable to recover his spirits, and as, just at this time (for misfortunes never come singly) we lost our eldest son, he began to fancy that some sort of ill-luck had fallen upon us. All the same, he went on making money, and nothing could have prospered more than did his worldly affairs. So several years went by, I doing my very best to cheer him and to divert his thoughts.

We had another boy born to us, and I hoped that my husband was getting over his distress about his brother's death and the loss of the amulet, when the whole thing cropped up again in the most extraordinary manner possible.

My husband, you must know, is a collector of *bric-à-brac*. Our private house at Bayswater is full of the most lovely things; worth a whole mint of money they say, and he seldom passes a curiosity shop, however small and dirty, without stopping and looking in at the window. One evening, a little more than a year ago, as he was on his way home from the City, he happened to pause in front of a pawnbroker's shop at which he had occasionally made purchases. It was winter time, the lamps were alight inside, and almost the first object he beheld, lying in a tray amongst other odds and

ends of jewelry, was the amulet which had belonged to his departed brother !

At first he could hardly believe his eyes. To make quite sure he put on his glasses, and peered so anxiously in at the window that the proprietor, recognising him, came out and invited him in to take a look round. It was his brother's amulet sure enough, and save that the chains which formed the necklace had apparently been wrenched away from the rings to which they had been attached, it was in perfect order, not looking at all like anything which might have been torn and worried by wolves !

“ Mr. Marks left the shop with his treasure, but not before he had obtained all the information he could respecting it. It had been pledged by a woman, he was informed by the pawnbroker, who had visited the shop upon several occasions ;

but it was now what was termed 'out of date,' and he had not seen the woman for several years. She had pledged the necklace in the name of 'Schmidt,' which had been duly set down in the book. As this book was examined every day by the police, however, it was very unlikely that she had given her real name. It was much more usual, the man said, to give a false one, even in cases where the goods belonged lawfully to the persons who pledged them. The woman was a foreigner—French, the pawnbroker fancied—tall, dark, and showy-looking; he would be able to swear to her again anywhere.

“My husband was deeply affected by this unexpected recovery of the relic. As he held it in his hand, and looked at it earnestly, he felt as though he were brought *en rapport*, in some mysterious manner, with his brother's spirit, and again he

became imbued with the conviction that he had been brought to his death by foul play.

“That same night, before retiring to rest, he repaired the broken chains, and placed the amulet round his neck, so that the case in which the agate was enclosed came just over his heart. He prayed fervently that some definite revelation might come to him, and then fell asleep, with the consciousness that he was not alone.

“In the course of the night he had a most wonderful dream, absolutely unlike any other he had ever dreamed. It was more like a vision than a dream, for he assured me that, during the whole of the manifestation, he could see many of the objects in his room quite distinctly, whilst in the midst of it a scene presented itself like a picture, rising, as it were, out of smoke, and that, hence, he was quite certain that he was wide awake.

“He beheld before him what looked like a recess in a subterranean vault, or cellar, of some ancient building. Wine-casks were stowed away here and there, and through a low Gothic arch, he could see what looked like the red glare from a furnace. The floor was of dark earth, firmly trodden, and did not seem to be paved.

“Close to the foot of a protruding buttress two men appeared to be engaged in a death-struggle. One of them was being pinioned to the ground by the other, and in the prostrate figure Mr. Marks instantly recognised his brother, in spite of a long dark beard which was new to him. The eyes and eye-brows, however, were too characteristic for him to be mistaken in them, and these eyes seemed to be turned towards him in mute and agonised appeal. Overwhelmed with the horror of the scene, my husband gazed on in helpless misery,

clutching at the bed-clothes with his hands. By-and-by an inspiration came to him, to observe with attention the dress, figure, and face of his brother's assailant, in order that he might be able to identify him in the future. He was a tall, handsome, actively-built young man, with a very remarkable countenance. The features were regular, the teeth even and white, and the eyes, which were large and brilliant, with dark brows and lashes, had a very peculiar expression, as of mingled sadness and tenacity of purpose, not at all the eyes one would naturally have associated with the mind of a murderer. Mr. Marks next turned his attention to the young man's dress. This consisted of a rough, loose coat, or blouse, of the shape of what is called in England a Norfolk jacket. It seemed to be made of some sort of frieze, or solid woollen material, of a

lightish colour, but having upon it stripes or checks of a darker shade. It was double-breasted, and fastened with large metal buttons, having upon them initials, or some kind of interlaced design, and was confined round the waist by a belt. He wore also boots of brown untanned leather, reaching high up on the thighs, and a close-fitting skull-cap of dark fur, which was pushed far back so as to expose the whole of his broad, low forehead. A hunting-knife was hanging from his belt, but he had no weapon of any sort in his hands. He held Dr. Bernard's throat in what seemed like a grip of iron, who, upon his side, was clutching with one hand at the breast of his assailant's coat, whilst with the other he strove to disengage the murderous hands that were about his neck.

“As is always the case in dreams and visions, what takes long to describe was

made manifest in only a few seconds. To my husband, however, the struggle seemed to continue for hours. Then gradually the light from the furnace became obscured, and a female figure appeared suddenly, looking black and featureless against the glowing background. She sprang forward and stood over the combatants. Her back was towards my husband, so that he could not see her face. She drew some kind of weapon, a long bodkin, or stiletto, from her hair, a tress of which, becoming unbound, fell over her shoulder and reached down below her waist. She bent forward towards the prostrate figure ; then, turning to the younger man, spoke to him hurriedly. Acting, apparently, upon her suggestion, he thrust one of his hands violently into the breast of his victim's coat, and drew out something that glittered and clung round his fingers. It was the amulet of

Solomon the King, the talisman which was said to protect its wearer from the malice of man and devil alike! The young man, kneeling now upon the doctor's prostrate form, thrust the talisman hastily into one of the pockets of his hunting-coat. The woman crouched down still nearer to the doctor, and lifted her weapon as though about to strike. Then, suddenly, against the pink glow of the furnace, another figure became visible, a woman also, and she, too, came forward. There arose, then, from the old vaults a sound as of the mocking laughter of fiends, and the vision grew gradually fainter and more confused. My husband stared at it with all his eyes, but something like a sea of blood seemed to rise and engulf the figures he had so lately beheld. By-and-by this was obscured by a bluish vapour, and when this cleared away he saw that the vision had entirely vanished!

But his terrible experiences were not yet over. Before he had recovered from the effects of this first vision he again fell into a clairvoyant state and a second presented itself. He beheld again the same cellar or vault, which looked even darker and gloomier than before as no red glow appeared through the Gothic archway, and a sepulchral odour of mould and decay seemed to pervade the atmosphere. A feeble light shone dimly upon the damp walls. This proceeded from a lantern which a man was holding.

My husband at once recognised the same man whom he had seen bending over his brother's prostrate figure in the former vision, although his dress was altogether different, and his face older, thinner, and more careworn. He was deadly pale and his limbs trembled. A woman was at his side whispering words of encouragement,

but, as in the previous manifestation, Mr. Marks could not discern her face. Sometimes she placed her hand soothingly upon her companion's shoulder. The hand was white, beautifully formed, and glittering with rings. Also my husband perceived that, although plainly attired in other respects, she wore emerald ear-rings, pear-shaped, and of remarkable size, whilst an ornament of the same description fastened the black lace mantilla which she wore over her fair hair. The two bent down and commenced clearing away a mass of confused rubbish, planks, shavings, broken bottles, casks and cinders. They both worked together at this task. My husband, who declares that he was wide awake, stared on into the half-darkness. Presently a sound as of a stifled groan reached his ears, and the man, dropping his shovel, reeled back like one drunk. The woman opened her arms

to support him, moving somewhat to the right, so that Mr. Marks could perceive what her form had previously concealed. By the light of the lantern which was set down hard by, a ghastly human face was revealed in the centre of the rubbish-heap ; the face of one long dead, but which by some strange chance had not yet become distorted beyond recognition, for a white film-like mildew which had grown over the sunken features appeared, whilst concealing the more shocking evidences of decay, to have preserved their original outline intact. The hollow cavities opening upwards with all the eloquence of eyes, were overshadowed by the black-beetle brows so painfully familiar to my husband, and the dark beard still clung to the dead man's chin. In a word, there was no mistaking the face of Doctor Bernard, in spite of the ravages which had been wrought by

death and time. Mr. Marks perceived that the living man of his vision appeared to share his own agony at sight of the dead man's face. Again the woman seemed to be urging him to take courage. She waved her white hand towards a spot some few feet from where they stood. My husband looked in this direction, and saw an open grave, dug in the black earth of the cellar. No doubt, he thought, they were about to bury his brother's body where it would be less likely to be discovered. To hide the spot where the earth had been disturbed they would pile over this secret grave the ashes and rubbish beneath which the corpse had previously lain concealed. Fearful lest this manifestation, like the previous one, should suddenly vanish, my husband, in spite of his horror, concentrated his powers of observation upon this open grave, in order that he might be enabled to discover

it should fate ever direct his footsteps to any such gloomy vault. It was fortunate for his purpose that he did this, for, in another second, the blue vapour again rose before his eyes, revealing, when it rolled gradually away, the familiar furniture of his room at Bayswater.

“ He fell back upon his pillow, exhausted by his terrible experiences. As he did not appear at breakfast, I went upstairs in search of him. I found him sitting up in his bed in a terrible state of agitation, and seeming, to my eyes, to have aged by at least ten years in that one night.

“ ‘ Bring me pens, ink and paper, Rebecca,’ he said, ‘ lest I die before I can set down what God has just seen good to reveal to me.’

“ Greatly alarmed, I did as he desired me, and brought the writing materials to his

bedside. He was muttering to himself, as though unconscious of my presence.

“ ‘They have buried him,’ he was saying, ‘as one might bury a swine, or some unclean animal! Where was the Taleth—the Robe of Atonement? But it will be for me to enshroud him as beseems; to bind the phylacteries round his head and his wrists; to perform over his murdered body the sacred Jewish rites! It was for this that the vision was made manifest to me, and in order that he might be avenged!’ Then he added, almost in despair, ‘But they will drag him from his secret hiding-place, for this last horror has not yet come to pass. The prophetic spirit, which came to me from my fathers, was upon me, and I was permitted to behold what is still in the future. They will clear away the charcoal and ashes which may hitherto have preserved his frame from corruption, and they will bury him in

that newly-made grave, maybe with quicklime ! Oh, God ! direct me to the place of his murder before his enemies have had time to do away with the traces of their crime ! ”

“ At first I thought that he must have gone suddenly raving mad.

“ ‘ You are ill,’ I said, feeling greatly alarmed. ‘ I shall send off for a doctor at once.’

“ ‘ Yes, I am ill,’ he answered ; ‘ but no doctor can heal with his drugs a wounded and sorrowing spirit ! When the blood of my brother’s murderer shall be as water at my feet, then, and then only, shall my body know health, and my mind repose ! ’ ”

CHAPTER VI.

As soon as he had recovered from the effects of his terrible dream, Mr. Marks seems to have become an altogether changed man. He was possessed of one fixed determination of purpose. He would discover the place where his brother's body was concealed, bury it with the sacred Jewish ceremonies, and then track out his supposed murderer, and bring him to justice. It was to this end that he devoted all the energies of his mind and all the resources of his purse.

Every time that he looked at his brother's talisman he felt confirmed and

strengthened in his resolve. The small red specks upon the agate appeared, as he gazed at them, to turn into drops of blood, which cried out to him for vengeance.

In a shorter space of time than he could have expected his labours brought forth results. By a mere accident, the pawn-broker at whose shop he had purchased the amulet discovered the name and address of the woman by whom it had been pledged. She was a Madame Zoubiroff, the man said, the wife of a Russian, who was accustomed to visit her from time to time, but who did not live in the same house with her. To Mr. Marks this name seemed to be painfully familiar, but he could not remember, at first, when or where he had heard it before. She was said to let furnished apartments in Paris, in a street which did not bear a very respectable reputation.

Undeterred by this, however, Mr. Marks lost no time in securing a bed-room at this place, representing himself as a commercial traveller, and carefully concealing his own name.

Madame Zoubiroff was a handsome woman, a Frenchwoman by birth, and her lodger soon succeeded in insinuating himself into her good graces. As far as he could judge, she seemed to be an easy-going, good-natured creature, of obscure origin and inferior education, but not at all wanting in sharpness and intelligence.

During the absence of her husband she did not pass her time in idle lamentations. She was surrounded by admirers, in whose company she was in the habit of dining at restaurants and visiting the theatres, so that, in the evening, she was nearly always absent from home. Mr. Marks discovered, before he had known this woman many

days, that her husband was in the service of Prince Crecszoleski. At first, she did not say precisely what his vocations were, inferring that he was rather in the position of an agent, or secretary, than of an actual dependant. By-and-by, however, it transpired that he was the prince's valet, or, as she preferred to describe him, his *maître d'hôtel*.

Mr. Marks knew, now, why the name of Zoubiroff had sounded familiar to him. It had occurred in the letters which his deceased brother had written to him from India, where Zoubiroff had attended to the requirements of the doctor as well as to those of his own master. Encouraged by this discovery, Mr. Marks prayed that he might be still further enlightened.

One day, when Madame Zoubiroff had been setting her bed-room in order, her lodger met her in the passage, just outside his own door.

“ *Tenez, monsieur,*” she said, “ *voici le portrait de Monsieur le Prince avec qui mon mari voyage en ce moment,*” and she handed him a photograph from the pocket of her white apron.

The passage was dark, and Mr. Marks took it to a window to examine it. Upon beholding it he was, for the moment, completely overcome by his feelings. Madame Zoubiroff, however, on account of the darkness, did not observe his emotion.

The photograph, which was somewhat faded through age and exposure, represented a handsome man in the prime of youth. He was seated upon some roughly-hewn stone steps, leading to the entrance of what looked like a feudal castle. The steps were bordered by balustrades surmounted by sculptured eagles, holding shields wrought over with armorial bearings. Several men, looking like foresters, or

gamekeepers, were standing upon each side of the central figure, dressed alike in some kind of distinctive livery; whilst, at the base of the steps, there crouched a group of savage-looking dogs, having the appearance of wolf- or boar-hounds.

"*Monsieur le Prince* is just going out hunting," Madame Zoubiroff explained. "He is very handsome, is he not? That is my husband standing a little on one side."

But Mr. Marks had his gaze riveted upon the central figure. He adjusted his *pince-nez* in order to examine the portrait more minutely. Yes; there was the short, handsome, Kalmuc face, the lynx eyes, marked brows, the fair hair and moustaches! The prince was holding a rifle in his right hand, a *couteau-de-chasse* was hanging from his belt. He was wearing a close-fitting fur cap, and a loose striped blouse, fastened with large buttons. Mr.

Marks recognised him at once as the man he had beheld in his dream. He observed, however, that the countenance was different in one respect. It wore a much happier expression. He turned to the back of the photograph, and found a date under the Prince's signature. The photograph had been given to Zoubiroff a year before the doctor's mysterious disappearance.

"The Cain mark was not yet upon his brow," Mr. Marks thought, as he returned the portrait to his landlady.

After this discovery, nothing fresh transpired for several days, during which Mr. Marks went through much mental perturbation. Sometimes Madame Zoubiroff herself became associated with his suspicions, and he found himself wondering whether she might not be the original of the female figure of his vision—the woman who had seemed to be urging on the murderer to the

fatal deed, but whose features he had not been permitted to behold. Then, again, he dismissed the notion as preposterous. Madame Zoubiroff was, apparently, a very kind-hearted woman, and her ignorance and simplicity seemed to forbid the thought that she could even have been trusted as an accomplice. One day, seeing that he appeared to take so much interest in photographs, she came to him with one which represented a shrivelled old woman in a high white cap, sitting over a *chaufrette*. She explained that this was a portrait of her mother, reduced by age to a state of imbecility, and who was being cared for at her sole expense in a private *maison de santé*, not far from Arras.

“ *Mon Dieu, monsieur !*” she said, “ one must care about somebody ! You men are all alike ; it is impossible to find devotion that lasts ! One would be wrong not to

distract oneself, but the heart cannot be quite unoccupied! That poor old woman gave me birth,—she looked after me when I was a little child, and now that she is *en plein radotage*, it is for her that I make my economies, so that she shall want for nothing at the house of the doctor with whom I have placed her *en pension*, close to *Arras* in the *Pas de Calais*."

These filial sentiments confirmed Mr. Marks in the good opinion he had formed of her. Nevertheless, as time pressed, he decided one day, merely as an experiment, to show her his brother's amulet. He took occasion, therefore, when she was passing the afternoon at home, to join her upon some pretence in her little *salon*, where he found her engaged in needlework. He had placed the amulet in a hand-bag into which he had also slipped some photographs of his children, and these he took out and showed

to her. She admired them, regretted she had no children herself, and then began to talk again of her devotion to her mother. In returning the photographs to the bag, Mr. Marks purposely arranged that one of them should become entangled in the chains of the amulet, and that the two should fall together on the floor. Without having seen what it was that had dropped, Madame Zoubiroff reached down her hand to pick it up. Her whole countenance changed when she beheld the amulet.

“*Mon Dieu, monsieur !*” she exclaimed, looking as pale and scared as if she had seen a serpent. “Where can you have been searching to find that ?”

Her emotion did not escape Mr. Marks, who was observing her narrowly.

“You have seen it before ?” he inquired, carelessly. “It has belonged to some one you knew ?”

She soon recovered from her embarrassment, and again Mr. Marks became impressed with her candour and sincerity.

“*Monsieur* must have bought this in London,” she said, after she had carefully examined the talisman. “When first I saw it I was astonished, because I never expected to behold it again; because, too, it is connected with those very persons about whom I have often talked with you. Here is its history: *Monsieur le Prince* Crecszoleski gave Zoubiroff, years and years ago, an old hunting-coat, the coat in which you saw the Prince in the photograph. Zoubiroff sent it to me with some other things, when, slipped in beneath the lining of one of the pockets, I found this. I wrote to Zoubiroff and begged him to inform His Highness of my discovery, when the Prince sent back word that I had better keep it, as it was a “*porte-bonheur*,” which he hoped might bring

me good fortune. I retained it, therefore, until, wishing that my old mother might have a cup of good *bouillon* the last thing at night, which was counted as an extra, I raised money upon that and some other 'objects' in London when last I was there, fully meaning afterwards to redeem them. The time went by, however, before I was aware of it, and so the *porte-bonheur* has passed into the possession of *monsieur* !”

After a few cleverly-directed questions, Mr. Marks discovered that Madame Zoubiroff had not pawned the hunting-coat with the talisman. It was old and torn, she said; she had intended to repair it first, but she had never had time. It was in the house at that very moment, hanging up in one of her cupboards.

Mr. Marks was greatly excited at hearing this. To make a long story short, one evening when Madame Zoubiroff was from home,

and the *bonne* gone out on an errand, he made an examination of the cupboards in his landlady's bedroom. In one of these he discovered the coat. It corresponded in every respect to the coat of his dream. As he examined it by the light of his candle a cold shudder ran through his frame. The lining was stained with dark marks in one or two places. Was this blood? he asked himself; and, if so, was it human blood, or only that of animals slain in the chase? After all these years who would be able to distinguish between the two? He next turned to the breast of the coat, to the place at which he had seen the doctor clutching in his vision. One of the large metal buttons was missing just at this spot, having been apparently torn away by main force, with a portion of the material of the coat. A terrible impression was produced upon Mr. Marks by what he regarded as a

fresh proof of his brother's murder. He cut off another of the buttons with his pen-knife, and put it in his pocket before he replaced the coat in the cupboard. It was a flat metal button with some kind of monogram upon it surmounted by a coronet.

Next day, Mr. Marks had a long interview with one of the chiefs of police with whom he had recently been in constant communication, and soon afterwards he paid a visit to Prince Crecszoleski's *château* in Poland, having discovered, through his landlady, that the Prince was absent in England. Here he made important discoveries. A peasant, who was a mere lad at the time of the doctor's disappearance, remembered him perfectly. He had been employed to help him and the Prince with their experiments in a laboratory which had been fitted up in one of the vaults of the old castle. He recollected the day of the wolf-hunt,

having been told off with other lads to assist as a "beater." He had never believed that the doctor had been devoured by wolves. Nobody believed it; only this was a subject upon which they seldom spoke, fearing lest their words might reach the ears of His Highness, who was the doctor's friend.

"What *did* they believe, then?" Mr. Marks asked, vainly striving to suppress his impatience. He had not neglected to provide himself with both money and drink, under the influence of which his informant became more and more communicative. He explained to the man that he himself had been acquainted with Dr. Bernard, and that he was anxious to learn every particular connected with his death, having never felt that the theory of the devouring wolves was altogether a satisfactory one. For some time the man seemed to be afraid to say what he really thought. (Could he

BE TOLD

suspect the truth ? Mr. Marks asked himself.) Then, after a while, he imparted his views, which were shared, he said, at the time by nearly all the peasants upon the Crecszoleski estates ; Dr. Bernard, as was well known long before his disappearance, was a necromancer or wizard. He studied the black arts, wrought spells of enchantment, and held communication with evil spirits. In the lonely vaults under the old castle he practised all kinds of strange, unholy rites, and he had persuaded the Prince to do likewise and to think of nothing but the study of magic and the raising of demons. Some even said that he was “an accurséd Jew,” who sacrificed human flesh at Christmas and the Pentecost, and that he was endeavouring to pervert the Prince to his false doctrines . . .

Things could not be permitted to go on long like this. Upon the evening after the

wolf-hunt, he could answer for it, the Prince and the doctor returned to the castle together. They left their horses at the outskirts of the forest, and came back on foot. It was then dusk, but he knew the Prince by his height, and Doctor Bernard, who was quite a short man, by his beard. Screened by one of the yew-hedges, he had seen them go together into the vaults by a little private door which communicated with the garden, and of which they alone possessed the key. When he had spoken of this afterwards, Zoubiroff, the Prince's valet, had insisted that he was mistaken as to the day; but then Zoubiroff was always fancying that nobody could ever know the rights of anything except himself! It was only natural, too, that for his master's sake, seeing that Dr. Bernard was his friend, and that they were both engaged in the same unhallowed machinations, Zoubiroff should

wish to conceal the magician's terrible fate ; for there could be no doubt as to what had been his end. Things of the same kind had happened, over and over again, to both wizards and witches alike ! In a word, the ignorant peasant believed that Dr. Bernard, in the midst of what he called his " impious incantations," had been carried off bodily by the spirit of evil ! . . .

The Prince, who must have witnessed the awful scene, was naturally anxious to hush matters up and account for his friend's disappearance in some other way. It had acted as a salutary warning to His Highness, so the catastrophe had had its uses. Everybody noticed that since the doctor's disappearance the Prince had been an utterly changed man. He seemed to have totally abandoned the study of magic, and the vaults, where he and the doctor used to carry on their unhallowed researches, had

been permanently closed for many years. One would have said, indeed, that the home of his fathers had become hateful to him. He seldom visited it now, save for two or three days at a time, and then he had never been known to go down once into the laboratory, although he had left there all the instruments and phials which he had made use of for his magical and chemical experiments. These were on no account to be disturbed, he said, lest, in the hands of the inexperienced, they might produce deadly exhalations or dangerous explosions. And so His Highness had locked up the door which led into the vaults from the garden, and had caused it to be further secured by an iron bar. There was another door leading to a secret staircase which communicated with the Prince's apartments, but this, too, had been protected by bolt and bar. There was little

need, however, for all these precautions ! It was not likely, after what had been whispered abroad, that anybody would wish to venture down into such an accursèd den ! Lonely and deserted though it was, strange and awful sounds were said to proceed from it sometimes, and one of the old gardeners, who had been at work not far from a grating that served as a ventilator, swore that he had heard some one poking the fire in the laboratory, and that upon peeping through the bars he could see plainly the red glare of the furnace.

There was no doubt but that the place was haunted, either by the ghost of the doctor or by the evil spirits who had carried him off. His Highness, aware of this, looked upon the place now as unhallowed ground. He was thinking of letting it, or of selling it even (so it was said), and his servants would scarcely miss

one of whom they now saw so little. Better, far better, for them that it should pass into the possession of strangers ! Perhaps, then, the curse which hung over it might depart for ever !

Mrs. Marks told me that her husband, after listening to these ignorant surmises, arrived at three definite conclusions, namely : that his brother had certainly come to his death by foul means upon the evening following upon the wolf-hunt ; that his corpse was still lying concealed in the vaults underneath the castle ; and that Zoubiroff, the Prince's valet, was either an accomplice in the crime, or that he had, at any rate, been aware of it, and had done everything in his power to screen his master from suspicion.

Before leaving the neighbourhood, Mr. Marks made every effort to obtain an entrance to the vaults, giving as a reason

the interest he had always taken in matters connected with psychical research, which made him desire above all things, he declared, to behold the ghost of the doctor poking the laboratory fire. His endeavours, however, were fruitless. Prince Creszoleski's retainers were too conscientious to disobey their master's orders, and their scruples seemed to be mingled with a superstitious dread of approaching even as near as the entrance to the vaults. But a firm determination of purpose will work wonders. Within a few weeks from this time, Mr. Marks had almost concluded his negotiations for a lease of the *château*, preparatory, as he pretended, to purchasing it outright. On his way to confer with Hugo, who was then in England, he stayed at his former lodgings in Paris, and there learnt from his unsuspecting landlady that the Prince's sister, "*Comtesse Dobrowolska*," as

she styled her, avoiding all allusion to her second marriage, was likewise passing through Paris, on her way to England, and staying for a few days at the Hôtel Mirabeau. Here it was that Mr. Marks succeeded in scraping acquaintance with her. Besides being to all intents and purposes an Englishman, he bore little or no resemblance to his Polish brother, and, under the recently assumed name of "Marks," his relationship to Dr. Bernard was not suspected. Madame Dobrowolska merely saw in him an English gentleman, with whom she had providentially become acquainted at the very moment when he was anxious to purchase just such an estate as her brother was anxious to sell. She talked over all the preliminaries with Mr. Marks before she had even communicated with the prince, and then started off for England, where, disappointed in her plan of joining

her brother at Lord Silchester's, she had despatched the telegram which had peremptorily summoned him to London, and prevented him from keeping his tryst with me in the old summer-house at Northover Park.

What took place at this interview between the brother and sister it is impossible to say. One of its results, however, had been, that Mr. Marks was to occupy the castle for the period of one year, with the view of ultimately purchasing it. Then, not many weeks afterwards, Delphine had sent her brother that other imperative message, which had separated me from my husband upon the very day that followed upon our marriage.

What had been the real object of that flying visit to the Polish castle, whence Hugo had returned seeming a humbler, a sadder, and yet a happier man, accessible

to those tender emotions which had hitherto found no place in his heart, craving eagerly for sympathy and love, and with a look upon his face as though he had for ever buried and hidden away some haunting presence which had come between him and his rest, and prevented him from experiencing the brighter and purer pleasures of existence ?

CHAPTER VII.

BUT meanwhile the French police authorities, obedient to the instructions of Mr. Marks, had kept an eye upon Zoubioff. To watch him was almost equivalent to watching his master, since the two invariably travelled together; and perhaps Mr. Marks, with his golden key, may have opened the minds of the detectives so as to enable them to understand his real wishes upon the subject. Zoubioff had furnished the police with an excellent pretext for their vigilance by associating with, and receiving, at his house in Paris, revolutionary characters, who were

known to be engaged in plotting against the Government, with which fact Mr. Marks had become acquainted by reason of his friendly relations with the valet's wife.

When, therefore, my unhappy husband and his sister paid their mysterious visit to Poland just after our marriage, they did not travel alone. Two simple and inoffensive strangers, to judge by their manners and appearance, entered the railway carriage which Zoubioff was trying to reserve for the Prince and his sister, just before the train started. They professed to understand no word of any language except German, and apparently passed most of the journey in sleep; nevertheless they managed to acquire a good deal of information in the course of it. These two strangers, arrayed in various different disguises, dogged Hugo's footsteps even after he had reached the seclusion of his own park. They succeeded, by some

means unattainable to Mr. Marks, in entering the vaults of the castle, and there, from a place of concealment, were witnesses of a ghastly scene, the same as that which Mr. Marks, with his inherited "prevision," had beheld, some months before, in a dream.

Two men, working together in silence at midnight, dug a grave in the hard earthen flooring of the cellar. It was deep and wide, but they worked on without ever pausing in their dreadful task. When it was finished, the taller man leant back as though exhausted against an advancing buttress, and wiped the drops from his brow. Then a woman, muffled in a long cloak, came forward. She wore a black lace veil over her head, fastened at the throat by an emerald pendant, and emerald earrings to match it in her ears. She said a few words of encouragement to the man,

who needed them, and then, flinging aside her cloak and veil, proceeded with her bare white hands to help him at his task. Not far from where they stood was a heap of rubbish,—mouldering beams and barrels, crumbled masonry, breakages of glass and crockery,—smothered with cinders. Slowly and cautiously, by the dim light of a lantern which had been set down hard by, the two began clearing away these *débris*.

But why should I repeat the sickening details which are already known to the reader through the strange revelation which was made manifest to the dead man's brother?

As in that terrible vision, the pale, eyeless face was ere long disclosed, and seemed to look up to heaven in mute appeal from the dust and ashes that surrounded it. Hugo, my husband, reeled back, overcome by the horrible sight. His sister again

whispered words of encouragement in his ear; Zoubiroff came forward to assist him. Finally the mouldering remains of Dr. Maurice Bernard, marred by

“Decay’s effacing fingers,”

and yet not so marred as to be past all recognition, were lowered hurriedly into the newly-made grave.

Zoubiroff collected the mould which was displaced by the interment in two empty wine-barrels. These he concealed until the following evening, when, favoured by the darkness, he rolled them down to the river which flowed through the Prince’s domain, and emptied their contents therein. Before doing this, however, he assisted his master in strewing the rubbish beneath which the body had lain so long concealed, over the spot where it had just been newly buried.

Oh, God! the horror of knowing that

Hugo should have come to me straight from this ghastly work as a lover—as a husband! That he—a murderer—should have clasped my hands, kissed my lips, and held me to the heart that was so black with crime!

Zoubiroff was arrested soon after this in Paris, having had time to travel thus far with his master before the particulars of the suspected crime had been laid before the authorities at St. Petersburg. His papers were seized, together with the old hunting-coat. Mr. Marks began by accusing him of the murder; one of the buttons of this coat having been found tightly clenched in the right hand of the dead man when, for the second time, his mouldering remains were brought to light.

“Thereby,” said Mrs. Marks, “proving either that a miracle must have been performed, or else that our rabbis did not

know the laws of Nature when they taught that, though man is born with his hands clenched, he dies with them wide open, since entering life he desires to grasp everything, and leaving it, all he possesses passes away."

Then the fact came out that the coat had belonged to the Prince, who had worn it upon the day of the wolf-hunt, after which he had given it to his servant as it was old and shabby. Zoubiroff had sent it, with some other things, to the woman who passed for his wife, but to whom, it turned out, he had never been legally married. She had been, for many years, Madame Dobrowolska's confidential attendant; and, upon leaving her service, had been established by Zoubiroff in the lodging-house in Paris at which Mr. Marks had taken up his temporary abode.

Although the valet possessed a cautious

and astute disposition, he was completely thrown off his guard in the course of the preliminary examination to which he was subjected upon his arrival at St. Petersburg, for he had been under the impression that his arrest was due to his intimacy with the Nihilists and Polish patriots who frequented the Paris lodging-house, and so was totally unprepared when he was questioned as to the mysterious disappearance of Dr. Bernard.

With every desire, as I verily believe, to serve and screen his master, the tissue of falsehood and prevarication in which he involved himself proved fatal to the Prince's interests. Finally, cross-questioned and browbeaten, the valet lost patience, and made a full confession. The Prince, he said, had certainly taken the life of Dr. Bernard; but from what motive it was impossible to divine, as the two had always seemed to be upon the most friendly terms. The doctor

must have seriously provoked His Highness to turn all his friendship to aversion. Perhaps they had disputed about something. The doctor and the Countess had frequent disagreements. It was possible that, upon this occasion, the Prince may have taken his sister's part, and been moved to anger against her husband. Of all this, Zoubirotff knew nothing. The Countess's maid witnessed the tragedy by accident, and, through her, he had become aware of it. It was quite true that, years afterwards, he had assisted his master and the countess to conceal the body more effectually, believing that the catastrophe occurred in hot blood, and without premeditation. It would have been far better to have destroyed it in the furnace of the laboratory, as he (Zoubirotff) had at first suggested. All had been prepared for this, and the furnace heated to a great heat; when, at the last

moment, the Prince's nerves had failed him; he having beheld, he declared, the face of a man looking down at them through the grating which communicated with the garden. The doctor's body was allowed to remain, therefore, in its temporary place of concealment, until quite recently, when it had been properly buried. The whole affair had always been a complete mystery to Zoubiroff, His Highness having been till that time of a most gentle and humane disposition. He thought it his duty to mention, however, that the Princess, his mother had been confined for several years in a private lunatic asylum, and that the Prince himself had had a somewhat severe attack of sunstroke whilst he was travelling in India. The fatal act may, therefore, have been committed during a fit of temporary frenzy for which he was not responsible.

Almost immediately after Zoubiroff's confession my husband was arrested at Monte Carlo and charged with the murder. There was one other circumstance connected with that ghastly midnight undertaking which it will be necessary for me to mention. When the woman who had assisted Hugo and his servant in their secret labours turned to the place where she had deposited her cloak and veil, the ornament with which the latter had been secured was nowhere to be found. She searched for it as well as she could in the dim light, for, besides being of great value, it seems that it was a family jewel. Hugo, however, who was in a state of extreme agitation, was, naturally, impatient to depart from the dreadful spot. He told her that it had probably become entangled in the trimming of her dress, that she would assuredly find it when they emerged into a clearer light, and that now they must

be gone. They departed, therefore, by the little staircase which communicated with the Prince's private apartments.

As soon as they were gone the two detectives, who, from their place of concealment, had seen and heard everything, sought for, and discovered, the ornament. Madame Zoubiroff, as I will continue to call her, who was arrested soon after her lover and associate, was suddenly confronted with it at the preliminary examination of the accused. She recognized it at once, not knowing then what might be the effect of her words, as the property of the Countess Dobrowolska. It had belonged once to her mother, and she nearly always wore it. Hugo's sister became, through this circumstance, involved in the proceedings, but, when sought for, she was not to be found. She had quitted Paris immediately after the arrest of Zoubiroff, of which she had pro-

bably been informed through her former maid. It was her custom, it seems, to disappear from time to time without leaving any address, and she had either done this now, unconscious altogether of her brother's terrible position, or else, deeming discretion the better part of valour, she had taken refuge in flight.

Madame Zoubioff, when confronted with the Prince's accuser, stoutly denied that she had been a witness of the crime, or that she had ever spoken upon the subject to Zoubi-off. It was utterly impossible to reconcile the evidence of these two individuals, which disagreed upon every important point. The woman was placed under police supervision, whilst awaiting the decisive trial. She managed, however—some said with the connivance of the authorities—to escape from St. Petersburg, since which time, like her former mistress, she had never been heard of.

CHAPTER VIII.

I INQUIRED of Mrs. Marks, as soon as I could find the voice wherewith to question her, how the Prince had conducted himself since his arrest? She replied, that her husband, who had gone to see him with his heart full of anger and abhorrence; had been altogether disarmed and softened by his demeanour. He had, as yet, neither avowed nor denied the crime with which he was charged; but having placed his case in the hands of an eminent lawyer he preserved the calm indifference of a fatalist. Mr. Marks said that he had no doubt

whatever of his guilt, but he had begun to wonder, after all he had heard respecting his occult studies, experiments in mesmerism, and the like, whether the crime—for which there seemed to be no motive whatsoever—might not have been committed when he was in some abnormal condition of mind or body.

Upon hearing this I was at once reminded of what my husband had told me of his sensitiveness to all spiritual impressions; his enforced and reluctant obedience to a will which was stronger than his own; and of the mysterious person who had so paralysed what he used to term his “volitional power” that he had come to consider him (or her) as his “absolute controller,” and whose influence it was to have been my mission to combat and counteract. I had always suspected that this person was his sister Delphine. I felt convinced of it now.

The face of Hugo, as I had seen it in my dream at Northover, pale, beseeching, appealing to me as though for mercy, recurred to me now with painful vividness. Tears rushed to my eyes before I could check them, and I pleaded earnestly with Mrs. Marks that she would use her influence to soften her husband's heart towards the man who was now so completely in his power.

"There is some terrible mystery about all this," I said; "something we cannot understand! I implore you to beg of your husband to be merciful!"

She replied that a great change seemed to have come over Mr. Marks, to judge by his letters, from the last of which she read me an extract, which ran somewhat as follows:—

"My brother Maurice is lying at rest now in the Jewish cemetery upon the outskirts of our native town, by the side of the

grave which contains the mortal remains of our beloved parents. His body, by what appears almost a miracle, brought about, possibly, by the action of the chemicals which mingled with the refuse beneath which it had been concealed, was mercifully preserved for my recognition. It has been enshrouded in the Robe of Atonement, and with my own hands did I bind the leather phylacteries round both brow and wrists. Was it not in order that I might perform these sacred rites that God sent me the visions, and is not my work accomplished? Or, was it intended that I should pursue the slayer with my vengeance? I am asking myself these questions now, and awaiting, prayerfully, the answer that may come to me. When I look into the face of my brother's murderer my heart grows tender towards him. There is no remorse, no indignation, as at a false accusation—no

shame, or malice, in his countenance. He is calm and self-possessed, like one who is prepared for the worst, but who is supported by a consciousness of innocence. How reconcile this attitude with the certainty I have of his guilt? I can explain it only by coming to the conclusion that he is mad, or by the sunstroke that he suffered from in India. I turn for counsel to the amulet which I now believe to be possessed of the most potent virtues. The red drops upon the agate which seemed once to incite me to feelings of revenge, appear now to have shrunk into insignificance. 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord!' this is the message that comes to me from its contemplation. Still, madmen like Crecszoleski must be restrained.' . . .

I remembered well what my godfather had said when warning me in the old summer-house at home. "Hugo Crecszo-

leski" (he had said) "is a strange incomprehensible being. He is not governed by any of the ordinary laws which control civilised man. He is a mystic, an impressionist. He listens to, and obeys, voices that nobody else can hear." Might not one of these "voices" have spoken when he had so unaccountably taken the] life of the Jewish professor, seemingly one of his closest friends? and might not the voice, as well as the will to insist upon this evil deed, have proceeded from his sister Delphine? But here again I was at a loss to conceive what could have been the motive which had inspired her.

It was as though Mrs. Marks had guessed my thoughts. "The sister is somehow mixed up in the matter," she said; "of this we are quite sure. Why, otherwise, should she have taken herself off? In *her* case, too, my husband says he perceives

a motive for the crime. When he was in Paris he tried to learn all he could about her antecedents. Several facts came out through his landlady, and he fell in, also, with a French diplomat, with whom he was already acquainted, and who had once been an admirer of the Countess's, during the lifetime of her first husband, the old General. From this person, having introduced her name into the conversation by mentioning that he was lodging with her former maid, he learnt that, although she had been surrounded by adorers, she was supposed to have cared for only one of them, an Englishman, occupying a very good position. She seems to have expected that this gentleman would marry her as soon as she became a widow, but when she was free he showed no intention of doing so, knowing, perhaps, a little too much about her already. She continued to importune him with her atten-

tions for some time, but at last heard that he was deeply attached to a lady in England, and that, whilst this lady lived, he had made up his mind never to marry anybody else. As soon as she had assured herself that all her fascinations were thrown away upon him, she seems to have retired in disgust and disappointment to her brother's country house. Here she became acquainted with Dr. Bernard, who fell in love with her at once. My husband discovered that at about this time she had contracted heavy gambling debts. Her brother was said to have behaved with great generosity towards her, but perhaps, for this very reason, she may not have liked to apply to him too often. Disappointed in love, disreputable in character, and deeply in debt, you can understand now why she consented to marry the wealthy Hebrew professor, although she may not have cared about him in the least."

I told Mrs. Marks that I could quite believe this of a woman such as she described, but that I could not understand why she should afterwards desire to do away with her benefactor. "Listen," rejoined Mrs. Marks, "and I will endeavour to explain, although you will say, perhaps, that all this is mere conjecture. My husband, however, who has thought of nothing else for months, fully believes in this theory. You understood that when the Countess consented to marry the doctor she thought that the man she really cared for was quite out of her reach?"

"The man that was in love with the lady in England?" I asked.

"Yes; and who had told the Countess that, whilst this lady lived, he would never marry any other woman. Well, Mr. Marks learnt, through this same French gentleman, that very soon after her union with

Dr. Bernard, this lady in England died quite unexpectedly. 'If I had only waited a miserable six months!' the Countess wrote, regretfully, to this French gentleman in Paris. So we know that in six months she had already repented of her marriage. To this second marriage, as I have before told you, Madame Zoubiroff never made any allusion, referring to the Prince's sister always as the 'Comtesse Dobrowolska.' Amongst the papers, however, that were seized at her lodging-house, was a letter from the Countess to her former maid, which proved not only that the woman was entirely in her mistress's confidence, but also that she must have been employed by her to act the part of a spy in the house of her English rival. This letter proved, too, that Dr. Bernard and his wife lived upon anything but happy terms. I have brought a copy of this letter with me to show you."

Mrs. Marks hereupon unclasped her bag, and handed me the copy in question. It was written in French, of which the following is a literal translation:—"You have then really seen her dead—this woman whose existence prevented the realisation of my dearest hopes? You are quite sure that the earth covers her—that her face is hidden for ever from his eyes? Your mission is now finished, and your recompense awaits you here, where I expect you as soon as you quit your present 'situation.' Visit the good old mother at Arras on your way—I can assure you she need want for nothing; but do not remain there too long, as I am expecting you with impatience; You will find me much changed and aged since last you saw me, for instead of the repose which I hoped to obtain through this marriage, and the devoted slave that I was assured I should find in my husband, I am saddled with the

most exacting of tyrants, who accuses me of being always in the wrong, who asks me all sorts of indiscreet questions upon the subject of my past, and who, in all matters connected with money, proves himself to be, ten thousand times over, a Jew !” Then, in conclusion, came the following significant sentence : “ The idea you had was a good one, and I shall always count it as a service rendered ; but if only the inspiration had come to you a little sooner ! All the same, the news cannot fail to rejoice me. One was very foolish to re-marry so quickly, but after the three letters you sent me, what was there to hope ? ”

“ My husband considers,” said Mrs. Marks, that this letter throws a good deal of light upon the relations of Dr. Bernard and his wife, and also upon those of the Countess and her maid. He fancies that after the death of the English lady—in which he does not feel at all sure that these

two wicked women may not have had a hand—Dr. Bernard must have become hateful to his wife, who, hoping to regain her influence over the man she had really cared for, prevailed by some means upon her unfortunate brother (a mere puppet in her hands from all we hear) to do away with the one whom she regarded now merely in the light of an obstacle. The servants about the place in Poland admitted that the doctor got on very badly with his wife, and a man who had been one of the Countess's footmen remembered to have heard her exclaim in a fit of passion, 'Alas! that I, a Crecszoleska, should have allowed myself to be contaminated by marriage with an accursèd Jew!'"

"And this woman is still at liberty!" I cried, "whilst her brother is bearing all the burden of her crimes!"

"I don't think she can remain in hiding for long," Mrs. Marks returned. "She is too conspicuous a person, and too fond of

adventure to keep very quiet. Somewhere she is sure to be heard of. My husband has placed an advertisement in several of the principal English and French newspapers, to the effect that a very valuable emerald and diamond ornament has been found, and will be delivered up to the owner, if it is correctly described, upon application. Possibly this may produce some response. Then she is, as I have no doubt you are aware, her brother's heir. Should he be imprisoned for life, or sent to Siberia, I think you will see that she will come forward and advance her claims, for, failing heirs, Mr. Marks says that the estates will probably be confiscated to the Crown. How thankful you ought to be, my dear young lady, to think that you have no children! If you had, you might lose some of them, as I did my eldest little boy, or they might grow up to be madmen and murderers like their father before them!"

CHAPTER IX.

I THINK I may say with truth that I come, now, to the most miserable period of my life. Only those who may have been placed in some sort of analogous position will be able to realise my sufferings.

I have taken so long in relating the particulars of my interview with Mrs. Marks that my readers will imagine, perhaps, that it was an unusually long one. She remained with me, indeed, for very nearly the whole afternoon; but what has taken so much time to write took far less in the telling. Several of the facts I have mentioned, too,

only came to my knowledge some years afterwards. I have set them down here, however, in order that my story may be as clear and comprehensible as possible. It was close upon our dinner-hour when Mrs. Marks took her departure, but I felt too prostrate in mind and body to attempt to eat. I retired to my bedroom, where I gave way to tears which I was wholly unable to control, but which did not afford me the slightest relief.

My mind was in such a state of confusion that it was with the greatest difficulty that I was able to tell Miss Warden of all that I had just heard. Both she and Mason appeared to be seriously alarmed at my condition. An English resident doctor used to look in nearly every morning to see my father, and they arranged—without telling me of it—that he should pay me a visit on the following day.

I was looking particularly ill, as it happened, and feeling faint and miserable. As I contemplated my pale face in the glass, I could not help wondering—in spite of my pre-occupation—that mere moral suffering, uncombined with bodily disease, should have left such traces upon my appearance. Whenever I had felt at all unhappy before, I had always looked too well for anybody to suspect it. But then, this was not a case of ordinary unhappiness !

The doctor—a benevolent-looking old man—came to see me next day. He appeared rather puzzled at my symptoms, not being aware of all the disturbing influences which had of late encompassed me. He enjoined quiet, cheerful society, and fresh air, with exercise short of fatigue—the usual prescriptions. To Miss Warden he said that my illness was chiefly nervous, that I was a little hysterical ; and he inquired

whether I had lately gone through any sort of mental trouble? To this Miss Warden could only make answer—seeing that he was not yet in our confidence—that I had been rendered anxious by the state of my father's health. The doctor left me, saying that he would see me again in the course of a few days. Since hearing Mrs. Marks's story, I had become possessed of an intense desire to conceal all traces of my marriage. Of course, if Hugo could have returned to me, having satisfactorily refuted all these terrible charges, I might at once have felt differently. I feared, however, that now there could be but little hope of this. His flying visit to Poland—immediately after our union—had obviously been made, at the instigation of his sister, for the sole purpose of more effectually concealing his victim's body before the new tenant came into occupation. The proof that the

vaults were secretly visited, at the dead of night, by Hugo, Madame Dobrowolska, and Zoubiroff, did not, unfortunately, rest solely upon the shadowy evidence of a dream! I seemed to know now, as if by instinct, what motives had actuated the two guilty persons. They had desired so eagerly to rid themselves of the place which was associated with their crime, that they had closed with the proposals of Mr. Marks before they had fully realised the risks which might attend the occupation of the castle by strangers. When they had achieved their object, however—as is often the case—the drawbacks connected with it had presented themselves; to Delphine, as was evident, in the first instance. She had telegraphed to her brother upon the morning following on our marriage. He had obeyed her, as he invariably did obey her—in everything, and the two had started off together to Poland, in order

—as they fondly believed—to make all things secure.

In spite of the pity I could not help feeling for Hugo, and a rooted conviction that he had been made—through some strange combination of occult forces—the tool of one who was more guilty than himself; the dreadful circumstances of the case had shocked and revolted me beyond description. How could I possibly become free, I asked myself, from all connection with this terrible family? It seemed to me, at this time, that this was the consummation most devoutly to be wished.

The fact that Prince Crecszoleski was privately married was known, as yet, to only a few persons. His accuser had become aware of it through my own letters to him, and through other letters and papers which had been seized at Zoubiroff's lodging-house. Zoubiroff had been thrown off his guard by

the questions put to him by those who were already in the possession of many important facts, and had thus been the means of furnishing Mr. Marks with fuller particulars. But Mr. Marks, in spite of the hardening influence which I had heard was frequently the accompaniment of great wealth, did not seem to be either unfeeling or vindictive. Might he not be induced, perhaps, by his wife—if she would consent thus far to act as my friend—to employ some of this very wealth for the future preservation of our secret? He had promised her that the Prince's marriage—having nothing whatever to do with the murder—should not be dwelt upon at the trial; but this was scarcely enough. I said to myself, too, that though he might have spent large sums with the view of furthering his own projects, he might not be so willing to fling away his money upon mine. In this case, how gladly

would I repay him afterwards for any expenses he might incur! I could put aside the income I was allowed for my dress; go about, if need be, in rags, and so pay off my debt to Mr. Marks by instalments. I could sell my jewelry; first and foremost of all, the cat's-eye ring, which had become now positively hateful in my sight; or I could borrow the necessary sum from my godfather, who had made me promise that I would apply to him if ever I stood in need of a friend. Why, indeed, should my marriage now be ever made public at all? Who would benefit by the disgrace and misery which such an exposure would entail? Not Hugo, certainly; nor Madame Dobrowolska, who was her brother's heir. Mrs. Marks had told me that the Prince would probably be banished to Siberia, or shut up in a lunatic asylum. There was no fear, she assured me, of his

suffering what we term in England "the extreme penalty of the law;" since—in the then-existing state of public feeling throughout the whole length and breadth of the dominions of the Czar—it would be deemed unwise by the authorities to publish abroad anything calculated to cast discredit upon a member of the aristocracy. The Jews, too, she said, had already suffered enough. If the circumstances of Dr. Bernard's murder could possibly be suppressed there was not the least doubt but that every effort would be made in this direction. Supposing the guilt of the Prince was established at the forthcoming trial, he would simply disappear, as it were, from the face of the earth, but there would be no public scandal. The worst that could happen would be, perhaps, that a paragraph might appear in some "officially-inspired" newspaper, to the effect that Prince Crecszoleski had, unhappily,

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gone out of his mind, and had had to be placed under restraint, and then nobody would ever hear anything of him again.

I asked if it was likely that I should ever be allowed to go to him in his exile, or visit him in his prison? Mrs. Marks replied that it was impossible, until after the trial, to express an opinion upon this point. She thought, however, that my husband would be as entirely separated from me as from the rest of the world. "How could we be certain, otherwise," she asked, "after what had already happened, that his wife might not become his second victim?"

Why, therefore, need anybody desire to declare our marriage? Why should it not be kept a secret to the end of time? I had no marriage settlements—no children. I could never marry any one else, of course, whilst poor Hugo lived; but it was not very likely, after this first experience, that I

should ever wish to risk happiness and peace of mind for the second time.

I called upon Mrs. Marks a few days after her visit, at the Hôtel des Anglais, and implored her to impress upon her husband how earnestly I desired that, if possible, no mention should be made of my marriage at the Prince's trial. She received me very kindly, and promised to do all in her power to further my wishes.

"But I can't think that you are acting very wisely," she said, "in wanting to hush up your marriage. I should think it must be always pleasant to hear one's self called 'Princess,' whatever one's husband had done; and Mr. Marks says, too, that if the Emperor knew that the Prince had an innocent young wife, who had had nothing whatever to do with his crimes, he would very likely grant her a handsome pension. I hear that the Emperor of Austria has just

made a very generous allowance to a poor lady whose husband turned out, quite unexpectedly, to be a brigand."

"I want no pension," I answered. "I am quite contented with the little money I have. If I had a pension, people would want to know the reason, and then all this dreadful story would be sure to come out."

"It is a pity," Mrs. Marks rejoined, "that you Christians have made divorce so difficult and expensive, particularly amongst the Roman Catholics. Now, in our Mishna we read that the Pharisees allowed bills of divorce to be drawn up against women who had only allowed their husband's soup to boil over into the fire! I wish you could get rid of your husband as easily, but I'm afraid you would have to obtain a special dispensation from the Pope."

I explained to her that, although my husband belonged to a Roman Catholic

family, and had been brought up in that faith, we had been married according to the rites of the Protestant Church. She told me that, this being the case, she thought there would not be much difficulty, supposing I wished to get the marriage annulled, only I must then make up my mind not to shrink from the publicity which such a course would entail. I replied that I did not, indeed, feel as if I had the courage, now, to face the shame of such an exposure.

“Then you must try and think of some other plan,” she said, kindly. “I suppose that he never ill-treated you in any way, or made love to any other woman?”

“Never, never!” I answered. “I should feel much happier now, for several reasons, if he had not been so kind!”

“Perhaps,” said Mrs. Marks, “he thought it rather too soon to begin ill-treating you,

for I can't believe that such a man could have made a good husband, even if all this had never come out. How long ago is it since you married him?"

"We were married in October," I answered, "very nearly six months ago, but my husband left me the day after our wedding, and I never saw him again until he came here, at the end of January."

"Indeed!" returned Mrs. Marks, reflectively, "I thought it was much longer ago. Poor young lady! It does indeed seem hard that you should have your existence spoilt for ever for the sake of a man who can be, in reality, little more than a stranger to you."

I rejoined Miss Warden in the town after paying this visit, and we drove back together to our hotel, conversing as we went upon the painful subject which was for ever present to my mind.

We had the place, now, entirely to ourselves, having delayed our departure for England from day to day, first, on account of the anxiety I felt to learn all I could through the letters of Mr. Marks to his wife; and, secondly, in order that my father, who had been somewhat more than usually indisposed of late, might recover sufficiently to be enabled to bear the fatigues of the journey.

We were now in the middle of April, when Italy (for though the spot at which we were staying is now politically "France," it must remain "Italy," geographically and sentimentally, to the end of time) becomes lovelier and lovelier every day. The sun, however, was extremely hot at times, and though we felt but little inconvenience from this in our shady suburban retreat, we foresaw that railway travelling would become more unpleasant as the warmth in-

creased. We were anxious, therefore, to depart for the north as soon as possible.

We met the doctor coming out of the hotel as we drove up to the door, and he returned with us to our apartment in order to give us his opinion respecting Sir Harry, about whom, he said, he could not help feeling a little uneasy.

Miss Warden asked him whether he observed any improvement in my appearance, she having taken care that I should adhere to his instructions? He left the room with her, as I thought, to consult about my father. In reality, however, it was in order to confide to her his impressions with regard to myself. When she rejoined me the doctor had taken his departure. I saw that she looked as if she had been crying. She kissed me, still seeming to be greatly distressed and unnerved. I imagined that she must have been told that Sir Harry could

not recover; and that, because of the altered circumstances that must ensue for us both, she had been thus painfully affected.

But I was wrong in my conjecture: How can I here set down the dreadful truth that dawned upon me by slow degrees—my kind friend being careful to soften, by every means in her power, what she knew could not fail to crush me to the earth with sorrow and humiliation?

Some of the doctor's remarks, she said, had obliged her, very much against her will, to confide to him the secret of my marriage; and then it was that he had almost confirmed her in a fear with which, she admitted, both she and Mason had of late been haunted. Before this most miserable year came to its close, there was every reason to apprehend that I (surely one of the most miserable of wives) might be destined to become one of the most miserable

of mothers. I buried my face in my hands and wept bitterly when I heard this. How differently I might have felt (I said to myself) in different circumstances! Had I been even the *widow* (for instance) of some man I had loved and respected, how I should have rejoiced at the prospect of possessing a living reminder of the one who was no more! How eagerly I should have awaited the coming of the cherished being who would be likely to reproduce—in mind, in speech, or in feature—some attribute of the husband of my heart. But *now!* . . . “Alas” (I thought), “what have I done to deserve this new calamity?” and I recalled with horror, the words which Mrs. Marks had said when she was congratulating me upon having no children.

How hard was the destiny that could compel me thus to nourish at my breast the offspring of one who was either a murderer

or a madman! What possible consolation could I ever hope to derive in the future from bringing into this world of sorrow and temptation any such unfortunate child?

CHAPTER X.

I WILL not attempt to describe my misery when I came to realise more fully my unfortunate position. Miss Warden drove into Nice, and informed Mrs. Marks of the cause of my new unhappiness. They both agreed that it would be impossible for me, now, to continue to conceal my marriage. Nevertheless, I pleaded for a little longer delay, for I dreaded to tell my father of what I had done whilst his health was in such a critical condition. Even the doctor advised me to wait for a few days at least.

Sir Harry appeared, certainly, to take

very little interest in me or my doings; but, like all invalids who suffer from nervous illness, he was subject to strange alternations of temper, and his fits of violence and irritability were so injurious to him that we feared to run the risk of provoking one of them.

All anxiety upon this subject, however, was brought to an abrupt termination before I had made up my mind how and when I should communicate my dreadful news. A few days after the doctor's visit to me my father had another paralytic stroke. He was unconscious for nearly a week after this seizure. Then he rallied a little, and seemed to have something upon his mind which he tried hard to put into words. It was almost impossible, however, for us to understand what he said, his voice was so changed and weakened. At last Mason made out by the movement of his

lips that he was asking for "Nelly,"—a name by which he had very seldom addressed me of late years. Generally, now, he alluded to me as "the child," or "the girl." When I came to his bed-side he nodded his head and appeared more satisfied. Then he talked for some time very indistinctly and incoherently—turning, from time to time, to some one whom he seemed to fancy was standing upon the other side of his bed. By listening with the greatest attention we thought we caught the words "not a bad sort of girl," and then he said, much more distinctly, "I will have no scandal ; bear in mind, Courtenay ! no cackling !"

"He fancies that he's speaking to the Colonel," whispered Mason, when he again turned to where he appeared to see an imaginary figure ; "he is making up a marriage between Colonel Davenant and

Miss Helen," and the poor woman sighed, feeling, no doubt, how useless it was to talk about this now. The doctor came in just then. He was surprised at his patient's animation.

"He is exciting himself about something," he said; "is there anything upon his mind?"

"He is wanting to make up a marriage," replied Mason, in a low voice, "between Miss Helen,"—by which name she had been told always to address me—"and her cousin Colonel Davenant. It was always intended in the family."

"You wish your daughter to marry her cousin Colonel Davenant?" asked the doctor, bending down over the sick man. Sir Harry nodded his head several times.

"Say that you are quite ready to do so," whispered the doctor, in my ear, "and then he will become easier in his mind."

I shrank away, instinctively, from the bed-side. "How can I possibly make the promise, *now*?" I murmured, bursting into tears.

"Promise him this," entreated the doctor; "should he recover, he will forget all about it."

I looked towards the bed, not knowing what to do. Sir Harry's eyes were fixed upon me with an expression, as I fancied, of almost fierce command. I quailed beneath their glance.

"Yes, yes," I faltered. "I promise! I promise that I will marry Courtenay Davenant, some day."

My father sank back upon his pillow as though intensely relieved. Three days afterwards he passed peacefully away, without having ever spoken intelligibly again.

Miss Warden and the doctor used every persuasion to prevent me from looking upon

him after death, dreading the effect which might be produced upon me by so solemn a sight. I persisted, however, in my entreaties to be allowed to see him once more, and felt glad afterwards that I had done so. I observed upon the calm and peaceful face, whence all strife and bitterness seemed to have departed for ever, an expression which recalled the genial, kind-hearted, Sir Harry Davenant of the old time. I could believe, as I looked at him, that the man who lay there in the sleep of death was the same tender and indulgent father who used to play with me, and take me upon his knee, in the days of my departed childhood, before the cloud which had grown out of his sorrow had obscured all that was bright and affectionate in his nature, and I felt that my recollection of him would be far less painful to me, in the future, from having looked upon him thus for the last time.

Before evening Miss Warden telegraphed to the family solicitor—Mr. Corbyn, by name—apprising him of Sir Harry's decease, asking for instructions, and begging him to communicate the news, at once, to Colonel Davenant, about whose present address we were uncertain.

The lawyer's reply arrived upon the following day. Sir Harry's body was to be conveyed to England for interment in the family vault. Colonel Davenant—who happened just now to be in London—would attend the funeral. My father's will was in the possession of his solicitors. I was to search, however, amongst the papers which he had taken with him abroad to see whether he had left any additional wishes in writing.

Acting upon these instructions I took the black leather dispatch-box—the only receptacle for private papers which Sir

Harry had brought with him—into my bedroom, and began my search. I hoped to find here some memorial of my dead mother—a carefully treasured letter, perhaps; a ring; a flower; or a ribband which she might once have worn; something which would give me a truer insight regarding my father's heart than had been afforded by his strange behaviour ever since her decease. I possessed only two letters—quite short ones—in my mother's handwriting, which had been given me by Mason, and which I looked upon as my most precious treasures. They had been written by my mother when I was only two years old, and when she must have been absent from Northover for a few days upon a visit. Every line in these two letters breathed the tenderest maternal solicitude, and I was never tired of reading them over. The handwriting was beautiful, though somewhat peculiar. I had taken it

as a model for my own, and had succeeded, by dint of patient efforts at imitation, helped, it may be, by some inherited tendency, in writing almost exactly like her. It was upon some scrap of this characteristic handwriting that I was hoping to light now. Another letter, perhaps, which I might cherish with my other two treasures.

Alas, I found nothing that could comfort me in my desolation! I came, however, upon a very mysterious letter, written, apparently, shortly after my mother's death; after reading which I became a prey to the most agitating conjectures. It was written in French, a language in which my father had never been very proficient, and in order, I suppose, to make quite sure of its meaning, he had scribbled a rough translation—probably with the aid of a dictionary—upon the blank side of the paper upon

which the letter was written. I give this in Sir Harry's own words :—

“SIR,

“In searching amongst the effects of miladi which you were good enough to give me, I found in the pocket of one of her morning dresses a letter to the address of a certain individual, which she must, probably, have forgotten to put to the post, having had, no doubt, the intention of doing so herself. Afterwards I fell upon two others. Thus I am possessed at this moment of three letters in all; and, as they are not letters to leave lying about (*à laisser traîner*), being somewhat compromising to miladi, I venture to apprise you, sir, of my discovery; and I wish to say that if you will have the obligingness to send me quite a small present—say fifty pounds sterling—I will lose no time in forwarding the letters

to your address, so that there should be no fear of the slightest scandal. I hope, sir, you will not accuse me of extortion (*chantage*), because I have dared to put a price upon this little service. Believe me, it is not for myself that I desire to amass money: but I have a poor old mother who looked well after me when I was a little child, and now that she is '*en plein radotage*,' it is for her that I make my economies, so that she may want for nothing at the house of the doctor with whom I have placed her '*en pension*,' close to *Arras* in the *Pas-de-Calais*. I hope, therefore, *monsieur*, that you will have the goodness to honour me with an answer, and I beg you to accept my most respectful salutations.

“CELESTINE VIGON.”

Celestine Vigon was the name of the French maid who had been with my mother at the time of her death. As I stood staring at her

letter in utter bewilderment, I could recall her perfectly, although I had never beheld her since that time. A tall, dark young woman, with fine eyes, and regular, though somewhat massive, features. I remembered her long gold earrings; her straight, upright figure; her good-natured smile, and even white teeth. This woman, then (I said to myself), was none other than Madame Zoubiroff, the person who had been the Countess Dobrowolska's maid and *confidante*; who had pawned Dr. Bernard's amulet, and at whose lodging-house in Paris Mr. Marks had taken up his abode with the view of tracking out and bringing to justice his brother's murderer! How did this woman come to be in my poor mother's service? At whose recommendation had she been engaged? What were these three "compromising" letters which she asserted that she had discovered amongst her late

mistress's things, and for which she demanded the exorbitant sum of fifty pounds ?

By-and-by a terrible light broke in upon me. Did not Mrs. Marks say that Madame Dobrowolska had placed her French maid as a spy in the house of her "English rival" ? and did not Mr. Marks suspect that Madame Dobrowolska and her creature had had a hand in this English rival's death ? Was my poor mother this "English rival" ? In whose affections could she ever have sought to rival the Countess ? For some time my mind was too stunned and confused to admit of my thinking reasonably. Then I set myself to work out, as calmly and collectedly as I could, the mystery that confronted me.

Miss Warden's absurd phrase, "the plot is thickening," recurred to me in spite of myself, as such trivialities will recur, sometimes at inappropriate moments. How

fond she was of saying this in the days
when nothing whatever used to happen!
The "plot" was certainly "thickening"
now, however, with a vengeance!

CHAPTER XI.

THIS is how I endeavoured, in my ignorance, to explain the strange and dramatic incidents of the case :—

My father, Sir Harry Davenant, of Northover Park, I said to myself (the “Englishman in a good position”), had somehow and somewhere (in Paris or in London, perhaps) fallen in with Madame Dobrowolska after his marriage to my mother. A flirtation of some kind had ensued, which upon his side was not serious. Madame Dobrowolska, however, had fallen in love seriously with my father . . .

To any one who had known him when he was a younger and a happier man this would not have seemed impossible. Only that very morning Mason had remarked, upon looking on him in death how handsome and good-tempered he used to be when she had first entered his service; how different in every respect from the changed being we had known in later years. It seemed unlikely, certainly, that after his marriage to my mother, to whom he had appeared to be so thoroughly devoted, he should have paid attentions to any other woman, or concealed for a single day the fact that he was no longer a bachelor. But Madame Dobrowolska, perhaps, might have made the first advances. She did not seem to be a person who would have behaved in an over-delicate manner.

At that time, too, she was said to have been exceedingly beautiful; and in the pre-

sence of an exceedingly beautiful woman who is displaying all her powers of fascination, men are said to be often exceedingly weak ! Then again, she possessed the gift of dominating people mesmerically . . .

Sir Harry might have been tempted, therefore, into going further than he had intended by the wiles of this wicked and deceitful syren. But then, his better nature had triumphed, and he had fled from her and returned to my mother. He had left her mad with anger and jealousy and wounded pride, and she had set to work to think upon some plan of revenge.

Somehow—it would be hopeless at this distance of time to conjecture as to who could have been her accomplices, she had managed to introduce her unscrupulous emissary into my mother's household as lady's-maid. Celestine Vigon (alias "Madame Zoubiroff") seemed to be one of those

terrible women who, whilst preserving a smiling and unruffled exterior, and a conscience ever ready to absolve, by reason of the pretended benevolence of their ulterior motives, are capable of committing the most horrible crimes. I had read, only quite lately, that just such another woman had poisoned a whole family in a quiet little French village—the cradle, as one might have imagined, of Arcadian innocence and simplicity—for the sake of a sum which scarcely exceeded five francs. Who could say to what fatal lengths Celestine's insatiable greed of gain—or as she would prefer, of course, to designate it, her exemplary devotion to her aged mother at Arras—might not have tempted her to proceed? I grew cold and faint at heart as I pondered on the horrible possibilities that lay shrouded in the obscurity of the past!

After awhile, however, I went on with

my meditations. My mother then, my beautiful, tender mother, was dead and gone. If she had been hurried by foul means to her nameless grave I prayed that I might never be made aware of it. The suspicion of any such tragedy was terrible enough, the certainty of it I felt would almost kill me! At this moment when my mental and physical powers of endurance were being taxed to the utmost, I would endeavour to drive from me any such agonising suspicion.

My father, then, was now a widower; his young wife was dead and buried. Her face, as Madame Dobrowolska (that fiend in human shape!) had written to her servant and spy, was hidden away from his eyes for ever! But then (fortunately for my father at least) Madame Dobrowolska was married to another! He had gone abroad immediately after his wife's funeral.

Did he fall in again, during his roving, with the terrible Polish Countess, and crave for her sympathy and friendship in his desolate and forlorn condition? and had this *rapprochement* re-inspired her with hope and lured her on to the commission of a diabolical crime?

Perhaps all this would account for the strange interest which Hugo had manifested in me upon the first occasion of our meeting. His curiosity had probably been excited at learning, as he might have learnt from Mr. Collingwood, that I was the daughter of the man who had been beloved by his sister. This no doubt, apart from any newly-awakened sentiment for me, was what had made him wish to visit Northover, the old English country-house of which his sister had once hoped to become the mistress. Then, too, when we were married, he had dreaded apprising his sister of the step

he had taken. I seemed to perceive now, that this was because he feared some outburst of violence upon the part of the woman who had always dominated him, and because, too, he knew that, do what I would to conciliate her, she would certainly detest me as the daughter of the man who had seemed to despise her love, and of the woman who had been so evidently preferred to herself. There were two or three circumstances which appeared, indeed, to be somewhat opposed to these ingenious surmises.

My father had always cherished quite an insular prejudice against foreigners, and I had never heard that, previous to the death of my mother, he had ever remained away from home for any length of time by himself. I could be sure of nothing, however, which might have happened so long ago, and although Madame Dobrowolska was

certainly a foreigner, Hugo had often told me that she spoke English perfectly, and that she was tall and fair—like an Englishwoman. My second doubt, as to the correctness of my own theories, was occasioned by the remembrance that, when my father had learnt the Prince's name for the first time, he had betrayed no sign of its having been previously familiar to him; whereas Madame Dobrowolska, in the course of their intimacy, would certainly have mentioned this favourite brother, whose name, "like the crackling of a bag of biscuits" (as Mr. Collingwood had remarked), was not one that could be easily forgotten. I surmounted this difficulty, however, by recollecting that people did not generally allude to near relations by their formal titles. The Prince's sister would have spoken of him familiarly as "Hugo," or "my brother," and, as she was then Madame

Dobrowolska, my father might never have heard mention of the family name, and if he had, it was not unnatural, considering the state of his mind, that he should have forgotten it. He had seemed, indeed, to have forgotten so many more important things !

It was almost impossible for me, after the flight of years, and in my present state of misery and distress, to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion respecting the three letters referred to by Celestine Vigon. These were the same letters, I assumed, which were mentioned by Madame Dobrowolska, as having been sent to her by her emissary—letters which had evidently been abstracted by Celestine in order that they might be submitted—for some evil purpose, no doubt—to her unscrupulous employer, and which, that evil purpose having been served, she was desirous of selling to my

father. I endeavoured to recall the precise words which had been made use of by the Countess in her letter to her *confidante*. She had been very foolish—she wrote—to re-marry so soon: “But after the three letters you sent me, what was there to hope?” The letters, then, must have been calculated to destroy the Countess’s hopes, letters which, for some reason, had induced her to re-marry? One would have fancied, with any ordinary woman, that once a man was married to anybody else all hope would have perished as a matter of course. But Madame Dobrowolska was anything but an ordinary woman. She believed in the power of her will, as well as in that of her beauty, and, in spite of my father’s wife, she may have hoped to obtain an empire over his heart. These letters—possibly from my mother to some friend—may have expatiated upon her husband’s

tenderness and devotion to her, and upon the happiness of her married life. After reading them, at any rate, Madame Dobrowska's hopes were completely shattered, and, in a fit of pique, she had consented to marry the Jewish professor.

Had the letters been of any real importance my father would assuredly have endeavoured to buy them back, in spite of the price which Celestine had demanded; whereas he had merely made upon the outside of the envelope the following memorandum, in pencil:—

“ Attempt at extortion — ‘*Chantage*.’
Advised her to apply elsewhere.—H. D.”

As there was nothing more of any interest in my father's dispatch-box, I locked it up again, keeping possession, however, of Celestine's letter, which I subsequently showed to Miss Warden.

Whilst admitting that it was, certainly, a very strange coincidence that Madame Zoubiroff and my mother's maid, Celestine Vigon, should have turned out to be one and the same person, she endeavoured to make light of my terrible suspicions. My husband's arrest, she declared, had given such a shock to my nerves that I was inclined to suspect foul play where nothing of the kind had existed. Celestine, she said, had evidently been, at one time, in Madame Dobrowolska's service, and was probably recommended to my mother by some one who knew that she was a clever maid. I had no positive proof that she had been placed with my mother as a spy. She had written and received gossiping letters, no doubt, as servants frequently did, and, after my mother's death, being a grasping, calculating woman, she had endeavoured to extort money from Sir Harry upon some

ridiculous pretence, which he had very properly treated with the contempt it deserved.

I felt that my kind friend said all this merely to reassure me, as she was now in great anxiety respecting my health. I promised her, however, that I would try not to dwell, more than I could help, upon so distressing a subject, but, do what I would, I could not succeed in banishing it entirely from my mind.

I was somewhat cheered, in the afternoon of this same day, at receiving a telegram from my godfather. It expressed as much sympathy as the cramped space would admit of. He had been travelling night and day, having been summoned to the death-bed of his own father, and, upon his return home, had been informed of Sir Harry's decease.

Miss Warden also received a separate

telegram from him at the same time. It ran as follows :

“ Please inform me if report of Prince C.’s arrest is true.”

Before the day was an hour older Miss Warden and I had decided upon a plan of action. It seemed impossible any longer to stand alone, encompassed as we were by all these webs of mystery. Mr. Collingwood, now Lord Silchester, had begged me to apply to him if I should ever stand in need of a friend, and I had promised him that I would do so. I stood in bitter need of a friend now. Miss Warden consented to go to England in charge of Sir Harry’s body, and when there she would seek an interview with my godfather, and inform him of all the misery I had endured—of all that I was likely to endure in the future. *I*, in the meanwhile, was to remain on where I was, under the care of Mason,

until she returned, and we were then to go together to whatever place my godfather should advise, where my unhappy situation would not be likely to excite ill-natured comment.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Miss Warden arrived at Northover she found that my cousin Courtenay was expected upon the following day. We had previously settled that it would be better for her to avoid an interview with him if possible, in order that no inquiries might be made respecting myself—inquiries which it would be difficult, in the existing circumstances, to answer. She begged the servants, therefore, not to inform him of her arrival, pleading the fatigue consequent upon her hurried journey as her reason for not wishing to see him.

She wrote to me, however, that she had seen "Sir Courtenay" in church, upon the occasion of my poor father's funeral, and described him as "tall, rather dark, but with blue eyes and a most charming expression." "Ah, Helen!" she added in her letter, "if only the 'family marriage project' could have taken place before all these terrible misfortunes had come to pass! But, alas! it is no good thinking about this now!"

My cousin had walked back through the park with Mr. Corbyn, the family lawyer, whilst Miss Warden had driven by the road, and by this means a meeting had been avoided, as he had left for London upon the evening of the same day. Mr. Corbyn, having business to transact with the land-agent upon the morrow, remained for the night, and had dined with Miss Warden *en tête-à-tête*. He told her that

my cousin had been extremely sorry to hear of my indisposition, for I had given out that I was not well enough to bear the return journey, that he had spoken of me with the greatest kindness, and was anxious to conform to my wishes upon every subject. Mr. Corbyn said that he was uncertain, as yet, whether my cousin would be able to keep up the gardens and establishment at Northover House in the same style as heretofore. He fancied that, for the first few years at least, Sir Courtenay would probably shut the place up, as he did not mean to abandon his profession, and the appointment he held would oblige him to live a good deal abroad. The lawyer had then alluded to "the family marriage project." He said that, from the manner in which Sir Courtenay had inquired after "Miss Helen," he hoped that it might one day be brought about, as it would be greatly to the advantage of all

parties, not to mention the estate, which would also benefit materially by the arrangement.

Miss Warden, knowing how utterly I had placed myself beyond the reach of any such "advantage," endeavoured to impress upon Mr. Corbyn that it was entirely out of the question, and stated that she had heard that my cousin himself had been the first to abandon the notion. In spite of all she could say, however, Mr. Corbyn persisted in alluding to the marriage as an event which might come to pass "later on." "Sir Courtenay," he said, "had particularly begged that Miss Helen would not hurry her departure, but that, on her return from the Continent, she would take up her abode at her old home, and remain on there as long as was convenient to her."

Perhaps—Mr. Corbyn said—Sir Courtenay might have to "run down" now and then,

before "Miss Helen" had settled upon a new home, and perhaps "these frequent meetings between the two young people might end in preventing Miss Helen from ever having to look out for a new home at all."

Poor Miss Warden, acting ever as my true friend, wrote me word that she felt perfectly miserable when she heard all this, because she so thoroughly agreed with Mr. Corbyn in the matter, and felt equally convinced that if ever my cousin and I were brought together in such romantic circumstances, we could not possibly avoid "falling in love with one another then and there!" For this very reason, however, and on account of what she termed my "unhappy complications," it was highly important that no meeting of the kind should take place. She told Mr. Corbyn, therefore, that the doctors had ordered me

to remain for some time longer abroad, as my nerves were much shattered by the loss I had just sustained; that my plans were very unsettled as yet, but that on my return to England she fancied that I should probably decide to live in London. She had spoken thus vaguely as to my future, not knowing at what moment it might not become absolutely necessary for me to declare my marriage, and being anxious to avoid making more false statements than the exigencies of the case required.

“And so,” she concluded in her letter, “Mr. Corbyn will be sure to tell Sir Courtenay, when he sees him in London, that you don’t want to have anything to do with him—that you won’t consult him, or trust him, or treat him even like a relation, and that you refuse to avail yourself of his kind offer that you should remain on at your old home! But for all the terrible obstacles

that have arisen to prevent it, this would be the very way to further Mr. Corbyn's wish ! ”

I felt sincerely grateful to Miss Warden for the line she had taken. I could get on quite well, even in my present desolate position, without the sympathy and assistance of my cousin Courtenay, and I was not sorry that he should be made to realise this. When I was living my solitary, secluded life at Northover, and when, had he so willed it, he and I might, perhaps, have become friends, he had never condescended to come near me; and now that he was master of the place it was not likely that I should accept his patronage ! I was proud, even in the midst of my bitter humiliation; and by some process of prejudiced feminine reasoning, I had associated Courtenay Davenant with all my misfortunes. If he had not spoken so lightly and

contemptuously (I said to myself) about the possibility of our marriage; if he had not discarded the notion of it without any kind of appeal to my inclinations, without even wishing to know what I was like in the face, I might not have been so willing to listen to Prince Crecszoleski's proposals. Thus eagerly do we often seek to fasten upon others the responsibility of our own rashness!

As soon as Mr. Corbyn had departed from Northover, Miss Warden wrote to my godfather, and begged that he would have the kindness to call upon her, in order that she might consult him with regard to my future plans. He came to Northover accordingly, and remained with her for nearly the whole of one afternoon. It was with the greatest difficulty, she said, that she had summoned courage to tell him everything. She thought, however, that it would

be wrong to make any concealments from so old a friend, and that it would be impossible for him to advise us unless he knew the whole truth. She confessed now that, although she had begun by fancying that my godfather must have been in love with me, she did not think this now. He seemed to be so genuinely distressed at the story of my misfortunes that there could be no doubt whatever of his affection; but with this distress there had mingled so much regret at the knowledge that no marriage could now take place between my cousin and myself, that she had come to the conclusion that his love for me was more like that of a parent—the very kind of love, as she truly remarked, of which I stood the most in need at this miserable time!

But for the press of business consequent upon his accession to his father's title and estates, Miss Warden thought that this

devoted friend would have proposed returning with her to Nice. He said to her very earnestly at parting, "Some people make these promises" (the promises made by godfathers and godmothers) "quite lightly; and fancy, when they've given the child a silver mug, or a fork and spoon, that they've done all that is required of them. But I look upon my responsibilities in a much more serious light. Dearest Helen is an orphan. Both her parents are now no more. It is for me to replace them to the very best of my power. From the point of view in which I look at the matter, she has now become, as it were, my own child, and it is my bounden duty to care for her, and look after her, and to comfort and support her, as far as I can, during all the trouble and suffering which may be to come."

Miss Warden said that, as he spoke thus, there were tears in his eyes; and, being one

of the most tender-hearted of women, she admitted that she had wept likewise.

My godfather listened with horror to the particulars connected with Hugo's arrest. All he already knew was, that the Prince had been conveyed to St. Petersburg, upon suspicion of his being concerned in some crime, which he had concluded must be an "*affaire politique*." The paragraph which announced this fact consisted merely of a few lines in a French newspaper. He had read it whilst travelling post-haste upon his way to England, whither he had been summoned on account of his father's illness, and he had had no confirmation of the news until he had received Miss Warden's reply to his telegram of inquiry.

At mention of Madame Dobrowolska, and of her suspected connection with her husband's murder, Lord Silchester had appeared to be overwhelmed with horror and amaze-

ment. It was evident, however, Miss Warden said, that he could never have entertained a very high opinion of her, for, upon being informed that she had disappeared and could nowhere be found, he exclaimed "Thank God!" with the greatest fervour, after which he added:

"My chief fear connected with this marriage, for I had never heard a word against the character of the Prince, arose from the thought that Helen might some day become intimately acquainted with this dangerous woman, who seemed to have obtained such an ascendancy over the mind of her brother. *Now*, however, I sincerely hope that they may never be brought together. They must not meet if we can possibly prevent it!"

CHAPTER XIII.

By the middle of the month of May we found ourselves established at a spot which, had I been under happier conditions of mind and body, would have appeared to me like an earthly paradise. "We," consisted of Miss Warden, Mason, and myself, accompanied by a courier who had been engaged for us by my godfather in London.

Lord Silchester, as I must now call him, had received permission to extend the period of his leave upon succeeding to the family title and estates. He had some thought, he said, of retiring altogether from the diplo-

matic service, but had, as yet, made no definite plans upon this subject. He came out to us at the end of June, to the place which he had selected as our summer retreat, in order, as he had said to Miss Warden, that he might comfort and support me during all the trouble and suffering that was to come.

Mrs. Marks had called upon me again to bid me farewell before she left Nice. As she was departing, she took from the hand-bag which she seemed always to carry, a small packet sealed up in paper.

"I told Mr. Marks," she said, "of your unhappy position, and of how distressed you were about it. He has written to me begging me to remind you, for comfort, that King Solomon maintained that a wicked father might sometimes beget a righteous son, as it is written, 'Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree,' and he also com-

missioned me to give you this jewel. Prince Crecszoleski, on hearing that it had not been claimed by his sister, desired that it might be delivered to his 'beloved wife,' to be handed down to his posterity, as it was a family heir-loom, of which his sister had taken possession, and which had belonged to his mother, and Mr. Marks has obtained permission from the Russian officials to comply with this request."

I took the packet, broke open the seals, and gazed with mingled horror and admiration at Madame Dobrowolska's jewel. It was a brooch and pendant combined, the upper part being formed of a square emerald of magnificent colour and size surrounded by beautiful diamonds, whilst the drop which was attached to it consisted of a large pear-shaped emerald polished "*en cabochon*." It was a princely ornament indeed; but I could not repress a shudder as I looked at it and

thought of all the horrors with which it had been associated. Nevertheless, as it was a family jewel which had belonged once to Hugo's mother, it was but right and just that it should one day become the property of Hugo's child.

I thanked Mrs. Marks with tears in my eyes, tears begotten of a variety of conflicting emotions, and, as soon as she had departed, I locked up the ornament in my jewel-case, registering a silent vow that nothing should ever induce me to wear it.

As I had pleaded that my marriage to the Prince might be kept a secret, at any rate until after the birth of my child, we were constrained, upon our way to the place which I have alluded to as an earthly paradise, to lose all traces of our former identity. I became, therefore, for the time being, "Mrs. Warden," a young lady who had recently been left a widow, and who

was shortly expecting to be joined by her father; Miss Warden being supposed to be a near relative of my late husband. Lord Silchester, upon joining us, was described merely as "Mr. Collingwood," without any distinguishing prefix, and by means of all these precautions, and by avoiding the resorts which are usually patronised by British tourists, we hoped, as the summer was now so far advanced, altogether to escape observation.

I know not whether the retreat in which we established ourselves is still in existence or not. The position of the smiling valley, the three torrents which met and mingled their waters together in a broader and bolder stream; the near mountains, pink with rhododendron, and waving with flowery grasses; the far-off peaks, clad in their eternal snows;—might enable me, no doubt, to discover this cradle of lingering memo-

ries ; but I cannot say how far the ravages of an encroaching civilization, more baneful often in its effects than even desolation or decay, may have changed or distorted its aspect. Some day (I often say to myself) I must go and seek for what was once so lovely and so secluded a spot, for there is a peaceful little "acre of earth" hard by, that I should like to look upon once again before I pass away and am no more seen ! As yet, however, I have not been able to carry out this intention.

At the time of which I am writing the ancient monastery of St. Dalmas de Tende (or "*di Tenda*," as it should more properly be called) stood in the centre of a broad and smiling valley, through which wound the picturesque highway, leading on the one hand to Nice (some two days' journey by the easy stages at which we had proceeded), and on the other, to the zig-zag which

conveys the traveller over the "Col de Tende," and thence down into the fertile plains of Piedmont.

The monks who had at one time occupied the convent (a wealthy white-robed order, altogether unlike the poor brown-garmented Franciscans who begged of us sometimes during our walks abroad) were now dispersed, and their religious house, having been taken by an enterprising German physician, had been transformed into a combination of private hotel and *kurhaus*, for the accommodation of patients requiring mountain air and complete mental repose. It was too "far from the madding crowd," however—in other words, what most people might have considered too dull—to be a financial success, in spite of its delicious air and its lovely scenery; and at the time of our arrival the only other visitor at the establishment was an old snuff-taking Pied-

montese professor, who departed for Turin upon the following day.

Notwithstanding the precautions we had taken to preserve our incognito we discovered that we were generally described by the servants of the hotel as a "*milor Anglais et sa famille*." Those to whom we were thus described, however, were merely birds of passage, Italian tourists, who halted for breakfast or early dinner, on their way to gayer scenes, and even these, as the weather grew warmer, became fewer and fewer, until by the month of June we had the place entirely to ourselves.

The scenery by which we were now surrounded was different, in its wild beauty, from that to which we had been lately accustomed. Instead of the grey olives, rising one above another from the rich red earth of the hill-side, built up into artificial terraces, and teeming with many coloured

flowers, huge chestnut-trees, hollow with age, upraised their gnarled and twisted limbs from sward as smooth and soft as that of an English lawn. The lean little parti-coloured sheep and goats, which, with their attendant shepherds, were often the only living creatures we encountered in our rambles, had cropped it down to the consistency of velvet, whilst the mountain torrents kept it fresh and green even during the period of the summer heat.

The perpetual noise made by these rushing and foaming torrents, which was somewhat disturbing at first, ended, just because of its being perpetual, by soothing my shattered nerves. Nothing, I think, could ever so vividly recall the impressions and experiences of this time as the surging and seething sound of a mountain stream, as it goes hurrying and blustering upon its seaward way. I hardly know, in fact, whether

I should ever dare to trust myself to listen to one again !

All the grass, however, had not been browsed into green velvet. Down by the broader river, which towards the middle of the valley received these brawling tributaries, there grew a wealth of waving meadow-grass, reaching, when I used to stand amongst it, so far above my waist that the tall ox-daisies and pink fox-gloves and the star-eyes of yellow ranunculus and white narcissus would seem to look up at me in kindly greeting ; whilst all the many-coloured butterflies that hovered above them would flutter about my head, and brush my cheeks with their joyous wings.

Amongst the rifts and crannies of the great rocks that had been washed down from the neighbouring mountains, grew rare ferns and mosses and beautiful Alpine flowers, the names of which were quite un-

known to me. Lilies of the valley, too, and wild strawberries were plentiful. Little sun-browned peasant children, with bare feet, would bring us baskets of these strawberries from the hill-sides which were rosy with dwarf rhododendron, growing too high up for me to venture now. Beyond this, again, were the black fir-trees, beneath the shade of which one could imagine that hungry wolves might prowl from time to time; and then, far away, with a pink glow upon them at sun-set, rose the snowy Alpine peaks, looking like the tents of some phantom host, pitched in the realms of faëry. I used often to gaze at the shining white peaks of this mysterious region, and wonder whether they had ever been explored by the foot of man. Chamois-hunters, perhaps, ventured up there sometimes; and then a verse of an old song, which I had read in one of my mother's

music-books at Northover, would recur to my mind :—

“ O'er mountains bright with snow and light,
We crystal-hunters speed along,
Whilst rocks and caves and icy waves,
Each instant echo to our song ; ”

So perhaps the crystal-hunters, as well, may have climbed up thus far, singing blithely as they sought after Alpine amethyst and topaz. Did it make men nobler and better—I wondered—to soar so far above the heads of their fellows, and to look down at life from beyond the reach of the tainted breath of cities ? I should have felt nobler and better, and happier too, I used to think, even from gazing up at these pure white peaks from below, but for the wretched memories that oppressed me continually ! As it was, even, I was grateful to have been permitted to dwell every day upon scenes which were so fair and so tranquil. I should have been

far more miserable, I fancy, in any less beautiful spot.

My godfather was certainly one of the most agreeable companions in the world. He possessed that kind of nature—a source of happiness to himself and others—which enabled him to feel an interest in almost everything. His mind appeared always to derive its sustenance from what was nearest at hand; unlike some people I have met with since, who have been inclined to grumble idly whenever they have imagined that nothing within reach was worthy of their notice. I should not have expected that one who had been accustomed to the amusements of courts, and great cities, would have seemed to be so perfectly contented with the peaceful distractions of our mountain retreat; nor had I been aware before that he was such an enthusiastic admirer of the beauties of nature. In the morning

it was his habit to rise early and to start off upon long expeditions amongst the surrounding mountains. He climbed very nearly as high as the chamois-hunters and crystal-hunters of my imagination, but by the time that we were ready to go out he was nearly always at hand to accompany us. We used to pass nearly the whole day in the open air, sitting or loitering about under the shade of the spreading chestnut-trees when the sun was at its hottest, and only taking our longer walks in the early morning or the cool of the evening.

I used to sketch a good deal at this time, and my godfather, hoping, no doubt, to distract my mind from sadder subjects, was always wont to encourage me in my artistic efforts. I was looking, only the other day, at a sketch I did at about this time, of the picturesque little village of Briga, which nestled hard by against the blue mountain

amongst a grove of mulberry-trees. Brown, low, little houses, built of rough stones, piled one on the top of the other, apparently without mortar or cement, unglazed windows, and floors of the bare brown earth. A narrow, brown, little street, brown men in brown coats, driving and riding brown mules. Brown women, washing white clothes at a blue stream. A white church, with a belfry of brown tiles, full of hammering, clamouring bells. A little *place* outside the church, planted at regular intervals with mulberry- and ilex-trees, and set round with heavy stone benches. Some brown beggars, brown Franciscans, and a stout, round-faced, village *padre*, in well-worn *soutane*, are grouped about in this open space. Then, to the left, upon a gentle hill-slope, lies a little graveyard with brown crosses, white crosses—all hung over with garlands and little pictures of saints. I

remember that I painted my picture entirely in different shades of brown and blue—sepia and cobalt—laying on the darker shadows, and my *padre's soutane*, with a mixture of the two, and dashing in a touch of Chinese white here and there, to indicate the high lights and the snow upon the far mountains, and that these few colours were sufficient to produce the effects I desired to obtain.

I daresay that this sketch would only convey a very hazy impression of the place it attempts to portray to those who have never visited it, but, to me, every touch of the brush is replete with memories. I can recall with the utmost vividness not only the spot itself but all the thoughts, the fears, the unacknowledged hopes, that came crowding upon me whilst I sat on my camp-stool by the roadside and washed in my colours! I had taken up my position, I

remember, just within the shadow of a kind of natural grotto, so as to be protected from the glare of the sun. Above me, an overhanging layer of rock jutted out from the mountain, which, I remember thinking, might at any moment have fallen and crushed me where I sat, but I remember thinking, also, that I should not have cared very much whether it had crushed me or not!

God bless you, peaceful little Alpine hamlet! I say to myself whenever I look back thus into the past. God bless your brown herdsmen, their wives, their little ones, their innocent browsing flocks, the chamois-hunters, and the crystal-hunters, that explore the far-off region of the eternal snows; God bless the kind old *padre* of Briga, the brown Franciscan friars, and the poor mendicants that crouch beside the open door of the village church! And

then, the little graveyard on the sunny slope of the blue hill-side . . . But, whenever I think of this, and look at the sketch I made of its poor little company of wooden crosses, some of them, because of the undulating ground, leaning all upon one side, their arms, as it were, stretched forth in pathetic appeal, as though entreating that they may not be altogether forgotten, the tears come into my eyes so fast that they overflow and drop down upon the paper before I can prevent it, so that they have very nearly spoilt my sketch.

CHAPTER XIV.

My little boy, "George," as we christened him in our hurry, lies now in that peaceful Alpine burying-ground.

It may appear strange, perhaps, that I should have lamented the loss of what I had so little desired ; but the maternal instinct is often responsible for many seeming inconsistencies. To those to whom the great mystery of maternity has been revealed, all women who are strangers to its emotions must seem to be wanting in some sort of sixth sense. Such women, no doubt, may wonder why I did not experience a feeling

of unmixed relief at the death of my baby; but all true mothers will understand that it is possible to lament alike at the cradle and at the grave of a first-born son.

I will try to record the events of this never-to-be-forgotten time in the order in which they took place. It was the 27th of August, and my godfather had set off early in the morning, accompanied by a guide, in order to see the sun rise upon Monte Rosa, and the higher Alps, from the summit of the Col de Tende. When we went out, at nine o'clock, he had not yet returned. Knowing by which road he would come, however, we strolled leisurely towards the town of Tenda, keeping under the shade of the trees but within sight of the highway. At a turn of the road, not far from that which led to the village of Briga, we sat down to rest upon a stone bench by the wayside; and, as the view in front of us was lovely in the ex-

treme, I thought I would wile away the time by making a sketch. Whilst I was thus occupied, Miss Warden whispered to me that two strangers were approaching, who looked like Englishmen; and she advised me to let down my white gauze veil, so that they might not recognise me, supposing that I ever fell in with them again in the future. I did as she suggested, and looked down fixedly at my drawing-book whilst they went by. After they had passed us, we scrutinized their backs with attention. One—the shorter of the two—was certainly an Englishman. His clothes, his manner of walking, were alike characteristic of the Briton. About his companion—a tall, dark man, wearing blue spectacles—we could not feel quite so sure. He looked, we thought, more like a Spaniard or an Italian.

As I was gazing after these two retreating

figures, I was conscious of a slight movement at my feet; and, looking down, beheld to my intense horror, an enormous black snake, gliding slowly over a trailing fold of my dress; having apparently crept, unperceived, from a crevice in the rock at our backs. It was a much larger snake than I had ever seen before in a wild state. The frequent presence of the snake was, in my opinion, a serious drawback to this Alpine paradise; but those that we had hitherto encountered were not larger than the English hunting-snake of my native woods; whereas this one was of a length and breadth such as I should not have expected to behold out of the tropics. Both Miss Warden and I started up from the seat simultaneously, uttering involuntary cries of terror. The two pedestrians, hearing our screams, turned back and hurried to our assistance. They were just in time to see

the cause of our alarm gliding across the dusty white road. The Englishman rushed after it; and, just as it was about to take refuge in the crannies of a loose stone wall, succeeded in despatching it with his walking-stick. Both the strangers, addressing us in French, then expressed their hopes that we had not been seriously alarmed. Probably they took us for French women, because we had bought our summer dresses at Nice, which may have lent us a somewhat Parisian air; and we endeavoured, in replying to them, not to do away with this illusion. The snake, they assured us, from its large size, was perfectly harmless; it was only vipers, — quite small snakes, — that were venomous. I was so frightened, however, that I could do little more than murmur my thanks, incoherently, for their prompt assistance. My white veil was still over my face, whilst Miss Warden, like the

taller stranger, wore blue spectacles as a protection from the glare. We fervently hoped, therefore, that our defenders might not recognize us if we were ever destined to fall in with them again.

They had scarcely bowed and resumed their onward way, when we saw Lord Silchester coming towards us from the opposite direction. He seemed fatigued with his mountaineering ; and, upon joining us, flung himself upon the grass at the side of the bench. To hide my agitation I began collecting my sketching-materials, which had been scattered upon the ground when I had started up in my fright. But my godfather soon perceived that there was something amiss ; and we then informed him of our adventure, and of the chivalrous behaviour of the two strangers. He appeared to be much annoyed when he heard that they had spoken to us.

"I know one of them quite well," he said, "little Montagu-Morrison, the greatest gossip and mischief-maker in the whole diplomatic service! I fell in with him early this morning, and could see that he was burning with curiosity to discover my whereabouts. He was the very last man I expected to meet, having heard that he had just been appointed to St. Petersburg. It turns out, however, that he's staying on at Turin, his old post, for a little while longer; and, during the hot weather, is making an Alpine tour with an Italian friend. I wish Fate had guided his footsteps in some other direction! However, I don't suppose we shall come upon him again, and it's very fortunate that he did not meet us when we were all together. He will not have any reason to connect you with me."

We walked back slowly to the *hospice*. I was still faint and trembling from the

fright I had experienced, which seemed to have affected me to an extraordinary degree.

Attached to the convent, and standing just outside its principal gateway, was a kind of restaurant—a modern addition in the form of a Swiss *châlet*—for the refreshment of passing travellers. As we came within sight of this *châlet* we perceived, to our annoyance, the Englishman and his Italian friend seated at a small table beneath the verandah—having evidently just ordered their breakfast. Had we entered the hotel by the way we intended we must have passed quite close to them. We continued our way, therefore, along the dusty high road, holding our white umbrellas carefully over our heads, and hoping that we were not being scrutinised by the reposing wayfarers; and then turning into the long grass by the broader

river, walked up through the garden to the entrance of our own rooms.

This extra walk in the hot sun fatigued me dreadfully. Lord Silchester was still worried about the close proximity of his English acquaintance. Mason was commissioned to find out from the hotel servants whether the tourists were expected to remain for the night. The answer she brought back was unsatisfactory. She knew no language but her own, of which the servants understood very little. They seemed to know nothing about the newcomers, she said—and she had not liked to question them too much.

Feeling very tired, Mason advised me to lie down in my bed-room. Here I fell into a troubled sleep, haunted by terrible dreams from which the great black snake was never entirely absent. I seemed to be for ever treading upon it, unawares, or finding it

coiled up where I least expected it; and then I fancied that the child I was hoping, yet dreading, ere long, to bring into the world, had assumed this horrible shape.

When I awoke, I could not divest myself of this dreadful notion. I rang the bell for Mason, who had assisted at my own birth, and to whom I looked as an authority in such matters, and asked her whether anything so terrible had ever been known to occur.

She made light of my fears, forced me to partake of some nourishment, and did her utmost to soothe and reassure me. Without my knowledge, however, she sent to beg the doctor to hold himself in readiness to minister to me during "the great pain and peril of childbirth."

Although the birth of my son, as I have been since told, very nearly cost me my life, I can say almost to a moment when he was born into the world; because, in

the midst of my misery, above the continuous rushing of the mountain torrents, I heard the great convent clock, set up over the entrance to the old refectory, beginning to boom forth; when, just at about the third or fourth deliberate stroke, I became aware, suddenly, of another sound which surely no mother has ever heard for the first time without a thrill of grateful wonderment, as though at the accomplishment of a miracle — the “bairn’s first greet,” of which I had so often read in the old Border ballads, before I knew in the least what the phrase really meant — the plaintive expostulation of a helpless and irresponsible creature, cast forth, thus, without warning or preparation, into a chilly and unfamiliar world. And all the while the great clock of the convent went booming on so many times that I knew it could not be any other hour but midnight,

although I was in no mood to count the number of the strokes.

“It is a little boy,” I heard somebody saying, “with a face as beautiful as an angel’s.”

Then it seemed to me that all anguish, and fear, and bitterness, died out of my heart; and that I was possessed, instead, by a feeling of peace and holy contentment. With those infant cries still ringing in my ears, and before the pulsations of the great clock had entirely subsided—lulled by the rushing of many waters—I passed into a state of waking slumber, or semi-unconsciousness, during the whole of which I could not fairly lose myself in sleep “for joy that a man was born into the world.”

The doctor had given me a soothing draught, and I suppose this was what made my slumber so unlike any other I had ever experienced.

My room had once formed part of an ancient chapel. I had been told this when it had been apportioned to me, as being larger and more commodious than the other bedrooms of the establishment, which were simply the cells of its former occupants, whitewashed, and furnished in the most primitive fashion. It seemed, now, as I lay thus between sleeping and waking, to turn into a chapel again, and sounds, as of sacred music, came wafted to me from afar. The kind old priest, too, of the village of Briga, with whom we had conversed upon the day when I had made the sketch, seemed to be moving to and fro between me and the shaded candles. All the while I was murmuring to myself, half aloud, that my child had been born with the face of an angel, and that the great black snake had been frightened away for ever. Then, as I was repeating this over and over again, I

fancied that I saw angels floating down through the fretted ceiling of the room, with soft dove-like wings and golden tresses, and that one of them took up my baby, whose head leant, quite limp and listless, against her bosom; and I thought that I was glad to see my little one in such safe keeping.

When I woke up it was broad daylight, only the green blinds had been pulled down. I asked to see my baby. Miss Warden and Mason both looked as if they had been crying. The old priest of Briga came out of the adjoining sitting - room when he heard my voice. I wondered to see him there, and asked myself whether what I had beheld had been, indeed, altogether a dream.

The old *padre* then told me, in bad Italian, that my baby had gone back to dwell with the angels of God. Somehow,

this did not come to me either as a shock or a surprise.

I asked if I might see it, all the same, and the old priest brought me, in his arms, a little child, lying asleep in a cradle, with a face, as they all said, like the face of an angel. I asked them to draw up the blinds so that I might see it better, and then I realized my loss, and kissed it, and wept over it, and clasped its cold little hands.

They took it away from me very quickly, saying that I should agitate myself too much.

Later on in the same day, they asked me whether I should object to my baby being buried in the Roman Catholic cemetery at Briga, reminding me that Hugo, although he had been married at a Protestant church, had been baptised in the Roman Catholic faith. I replied that it was a peaceful and

beautiful spot, and that I should like my child to be buried there.

Afterwards, when all this had come to seem like a dream, they told me that I had been very ill indeed, nigh, in fact, unto death, and that, just as I appeared to be sinking from exhaustion, a servant-girl, to whom I had done a few kindnesses, ran off in the grey of the early morning, and fetched the good old *padre* from Briga, thinking that it would be doubly unfortunate were I to die without the last consolations of religion.

By the time the *padre* arrived, however, I had fallen into a deep sleep, and it was about the baby that everyone was anxious. Miss Warden, knowing that I had feared above all things that some taint of hereditary sin or madness might be transmitted to Hugo's child, said to Lord Silchester, who had seemed to attach but little importance to religious forms, that this was the last

baby in the world who should be allowed to pass away unbaptised, and that, as there was no Protestant clergyman within reach, the good old *padre* had better at once perform the sacred rite.

My godfather had been so greatly overcome by the peril I had been in that he allowed Miss Warden to do as she desired. She remembered to have heard the Prince say, when we were at Nice, that if ever he had a son he should wish him to be named after one of the Polish monarchs—the first, or the last, but she could not recollect which; and that if he had a daughter he should call her “Maria Helena,” “Maria” having been the name of his mother. Finally, however, as Lord Silchester remembered that Hugo always alluded to the last King of Poland as “a puppet of Russia,” and as, in the state of trepidation in which they were, they could not call to mind the

name of the first, my child was christened simply "George,"—my godfather, in his affectionate anxiety to associate himself with me and mine, having stood as his sponsor. Miss Warden was the other, two sponsors only, being required in the Catholic Church, and then, just at the moment (as I like to believe) when I was dreaming about the hovering angels, my poor little boy went quietly to sleep for ever.

One evening, when I was quite recovered, and could go about as usual, Lord Silchester walked with me to the burying-ground at Briga, and showed me the little mound beneath which my baby was lying, and the pretty wooden cross which he had had set up at the head of it, with the ends all carved in transparent fretwork. He asked me what I should like to have written upon the foot-piece, and we decided after a while upon this short inscription :

“To the memory of George, the only child of Hugo and Helen,” and then followed the date of both birth and death.

A good many years have passed away since then, and yet, because of the distance and the long journey, and because, too, of finding something so sad at the end of it, I have never beheld this peaceful spot since that evening, when I hung a garland of white Alpine flowers upon the little wooden cross. But some day (I say to myself) I will certainly go and revisit it once more.

The sadness which comes upon me at times, when I remember that this child of mine is lying so far away, in a foreign land, is quite unmingled with any regret that he should be reposing in a Catholic churchyard.

“Heaven is a palace with many doors,” poor Hugo had said to me when there had been a question as to where we should be

married, "and each one may enter it in his own way," and I have no fears but that through one of these many doors my little George has managed to creep up to the foot of the Eternal Throne.

CHAPTER XV.

WE had arranged—before hiding ourselves thus from the world—a system by which we were enabled to receive our letters and newspapers. Lord Silchester had left his address with his valet, in England—a trusty and discreet servant—to whom, however, he had merely stated that he was travelling in Italy, and that, as he was in deep mourning, and in need of rest, he did not wish his name to be prominently advertised in all the hotel lists. Hence his letters were to be forwarded to him simply as Mr. Collingwood. As for myself, I never expected now to

receive letters. I had confided in Mrs. Marks, however—who knew so much about me already—what were to be my plans, and she had promised to keep me informed of the progress of the Prince's trial; for, although she was now re-established in Bayswater, she was in constant communication with her husband. We settled that all letters to me which came to Northover were to be forwarded under cover to Miss Warden; the same reason that had been given by Lord Silchester to his valet being put forward in explanation—that I was in need of quiet, anxious for privacy, and did not wish to have my name and address published in the newspapers. If, by all these precautions, any suspicions were aroused, we flattered ourselves that they must continue to be suspicions only, and that the real reason for our thus secluding ourselves would not be divined. The neighbours round about North-

over—some of whom had been said to share my cousin Courtenay's opinion with regard to "poor Sir Harry"—supposing that any rumours reached them of my indisposition, might possibly imagine that I had suddenly gone out of my mind; but, situated as I was, I did not care very much for what they thought.

Miss Warden had heard, through one of the old servants, that Sir Courtenay would not be able to afford to live at Northover for some years. He appeared, however, not to wish to let the place. Perhaps during these years he was going to look out for an heiress, and that, after he was married to her, he would come back and settle at the old house. Till then, however, he had left orders that "Miss Nelly" was to come and go just as she liked, and he had said that he hoped she would continue to look upon the place as her home. He might possibly visit

it from time to time with a few friends in the shooting-season, but to settle in England, just at present, would be fatal to his career, which it was not his intention to abandon yet. I should be rendering him a real service, therefore, he said, by continuing to live at Northover, keeping the house aired, and looking after the servants.

All this was very kind and condescending of him, of course, but I always experienced a peculiar sense of bitterness and impatience at any allusion to my cousin or his plans. Perhaps I was still inclined to blame him for the results of my own folly, or else I may have been animated by a feeling of jealousy at the notion that he was now the master of the house which had once been my home. Anyhow, as this is meant to be a truthful record, I am bound to confess that I had conceived a violent prejudice against my prosperous and self-complacent

kinsman—as I had pictured him in my own mind. He seemed, now, to be patronising me, and dictating terms. Even when I thought of Hugo — the cause of all my present misery and humiliation—my heart was animated by a far more friendly feeling.

Ever since the birth and death of my child, indeed, my sentiments respecting the murder of Dr. Bernard had undergone a decided change. The deed itself I regarded with no less horror; but looking back to the time of my union with Hugo—to his kindness to myself, as well as to everything that was weak and defenceless—to the self-control and the amiability which he was wont on all occasions to display—I came to the conclusion that if he had ever committed the hideous crime with which he was charged, his act must have been purely mechanical—the result of some irresistible impelling force, for which he was not

morally responsible—but that it was impossible to believe that he could be possessed of either the heart or the mind of a murderer.

I had imagined, certainly, that I had surprised a wild look sometimes in his eyes, but I said to myself, now, that this was the wildness not of a natural ferocity but of acquired mental affliction—the result of his too far-reaching researches. It was not intended that man should be anything but a finite creature. There were closed doors at which it was not prudent for him even to knock. But Hugo, in his insatiable craving after occult knowledge, had striven to force open some of these, and madness was the penalty he had had to pay for his temerity!

The Russian authorities, it seems, eventually took this view of the Prince's case. As soon as I was supposed to be strong enough to bear the news, Lord Silchester

informed me of the result of the preliminary inquiry, which had been conducted almost privately. It had been decided that there could be no doubt as to his having committed the fatal deed; but the trial was deferred in order that information might be collected with regard to the state of the Prince's mind, his counsel having started the plea of insanity when he found that the evidence was so damaging to his client.

The result of this inquiry had been that Prince Crecszoleski was pronounced of unsound mind—unfit to manage his own affairs, and irresponsible for his actions. The Princess, his mother, had been confined in a lunatic asylum for some years previous to her son's birth, having displayed signs of suicidal mania whilst her first child was quite an infant. Her two children, who were placed under the care of governesses and tutors, had never been informed

of this circumstance, which was, no doubt, the means of saving Húgo now from the bitter humiliation of a criminal sentence. He was simply *to disappear*, as Mrs. Marks had foreseen, being declared mad, and ordered to be placed in proper restraint. When this intelligence reached us he was about to be removed to a private lunatic asylum, which was kept by a celebrated German physician, Dr. Schumann by name, a few miles distant from St. Petersburg. The administration of his estates was to be vested in the hands of trustees. From these estates a princely revenue had at one time been derived, for, besides the timber they produced, and which was easily and cheaply conveyed, by means of the river Vistula, to the ports of the Baltic, there were mines of salt and copper, and quarries of marble upon parts of the property. Of late years, however—the Prince being such a determined

absentee—the management of the extensive forests, as well as the working of the different mines, had been much neglected. It transpired, also, that the debts of the Prince amounted to a considerable sum. It had been proposed, therefore, to subdivide the yearly income that should accrue to him—once the property had been placed under proper management—into three parts. One for the Prince's own maintenance whilst in the asylum, in a style becoming to his rank and position ; another to accumulate for the advantage of his heirs ; and a third portion to be set aside annually for the improvement of the estate.

In the course of the inquiry the fact that the Prince had been privately married was brought to the knowledge of his legal advisers. No further allusion had been made to it, however, neither had my maiden name been publicly mentioned. Had my

poor little boy have lived, it would not have been possible, Lord Silchester assured me, for the matter to have rested here. I must have come forward, then, as the Prince's lawful wife, and asserted the rights of his son. Even now, my godfather thought that it would be expedient for me to have legal advice as to whether I ought not to put forward a claim for some portion of the revenue of the estate; for he said that however much my situation might be deserving of pity in the eyes of the world, there could be neither shame nor disgrace in the fact that I had unfortunately married a man who had since been placed under medical *surveillance*.

I reflected upon this matter for a whole day, and came to the conclusion that I could gain nothing by making the public acquainted with my misfortunes, except, perhaps, an additional income, to which certain con-

ditions and restrictions might be attached—an enforced residence in Russia, for instance, for some part of each year—which would seriously interfere with my liberty of action. I decided therefore, that, at any rate for the present, I would prefer not to divulge my secret. My child, for whose sake I must have come forward from my obscurity, was dead and buried; and I would far rather (I declared) be looked upon, for the rest of my days, simply as “Helen Davenant,” a common-place old maid, than parade as a Polish Princess with so tragic a past.

Now that Sir Harry’s affairs had been disposed of, I found myself exceedingly well off. My father, indeed, had left me nothing beyond what had been secured to me by his marriage settlement; not even the diamonds which my mother had worn, and which were left to my cousin Courtenay, for the

use of his future wife. Sixty thousand pounds, however, had been set aside at the time of my father's marriage with my mother, for the benefit of their younger children; and, as I happened to be the sole offspring of the union, this sum of money had accrued to me now, together with the small estate of Croft's Farm, which adjoined Northover Park, and upon which, in a pretty old manor-house, my mother had resided—previous to her marriage—with her father, a retired Major-General. At this time she had no prospect of being the small heiress she eventually became; for my uncle Everard, a gallant young artilleryman, was then alive. He was killed, however, only a few years afterwards, in the Crimea; and, upon the death of the old General, the fortune which would have been his passed to my mother, who thus became entitled to about two thousand a year.

This income descended to me as soon as I attained my majority; so that, with the sixty thousand previously settled, I felt that I possessed enough and to spare without coveting any portion of the revenues of the Crecszoleski estates. I asked my godfather whether he thought that Madame Dobrowolska would ever put forward her claim as her brother's heir; when, by so doing, she might run the risk of being tried for murder or confined in a madhouse; for, of course, the plea of insanity would be available, also, in her case? He replied, that he hoped, for her own sake, that she would keep out of the way; but that she was a very peculiar person, capable of doing the most rash and unexpected things, and seeming even to take pleasure in everything that was associated with danger. Had she been a younger woman—likely to marry again and have children—some of these might bring forward their claims in the future.

There was not much chance, however, he thought, of any such contingency now. I felt, I knew not wherefore, that the name of this terrible woman possessed a kind of unaccountable fascination for me. I should have shrunk from any sort of contact with her as I should have shrunk from contact with a poisonous serpent. And yet, now that she was powerless, as I thought, to harm me, I felt a desire to talk about her—to learn what she was like in the face—and to know more of her personal history; just as I might have been tempted to examine one of those same poisonous serpents through the panes of its glass prison at the Zoological Gardens.

“What is she like?” I asked, curious to learn every peculiarity of feature and expression.

But, to Lord Silchester, the subject did not appear to be equally fascinating.

“She was a beautiful woman, once,” he

answered, an expression of pain—akin to that which poor Hugo had so often displayed at mention of this name—clouding his brow for a moment; “tall, with a fine figure, and extraordinary hair. But she has led a strange, wandering, somewhat disreputable existence. She is probably much changed since I saw her last.”

I asked him whether she at all resembled Hugo in face or manner?

He replied, that he could never perceive much resemblance between them himself, but that he was not a good hand at seeing likenesses. There was a similarity about their colouring, and they were both tall. Madame Dobrowolska, however, had the handsomer features.

“She was fair, then?” I asked, thinking of the fair-haired woman of Mr. Marks’s vision.

"Yes; she had very fair hair," he answered, "like her brother—with very dark eye-lashes and eye-brows, and no colour in her face—a fairness altogether unlike the fairness of an Englishwoman."

"But why should we talk upon such painful subjects?" he exclaimed suddenly, as though resenting the effect of some unpleasant memory; "if you are to gain no advantages of any kind by your unfortunate marriage, it would be surely better to endeavour to forget that you were ever allied to this unhappy family at all. There is something else that I want to talk over with you—a plan for the future."

I, too, had a plan in my mind, but I knew not how to bring it about, how to allude to it, even, without appearing to be inconsistent.

"Let me tell you of something first," I

said, "before you speak of any plan which is sure to seem pleasanter than mine. If I don't declare my marriage it isn't because I want to shirk any of its duties, any of the pain that I have brought upon myself. Hugo is still my husband. I ought to go where I could see him from time to time, to be within reach of the place where he is, in case he might be ill or in want of me. There is some strange mystery about this story of the murder, something mesmeric, which we are unable to understand, and it must be so dreadful for him to be cut off from all the world! But how can I go all the way to St. Petersburg by myself, and who could I find who would go with me so far?"

I noticed that my godfather's face brightened as I was speaking.

"My dearest Helen," he exclaimed, "that your kind heart should have prompted you

to wish this is fortunate indeed for me ! For some years I have had an ambition, as all men of my age ought to have, an ambition, in my case, connected with my diplomatic career. Two days ago I heard that this might be about to be realised, but, like so many hoped-for things, it seemed to have come too late, although, during my father's lifetime, I could hardly have accepted a post which would have taken me so far away from home, even had it been offered to me. Having been with you, however, in your danger and suffering, you know not, my child, how dear you have become to me. I have tasted the delightful intimacy and repose of home life, which, in spite of my years, was entirely new to me. I felt, dear Helen, that I could not have abandoned you now, in your helpless and unprotected state. In a word, with some regret, as I cannot help admitting, I had

just made up my mind to refuse what I had been looking to as the culmination of my professional hopes, and to vegetate quietly at home, where you could have been near me, at Croft's Farm, and I could have seen you often. But now, all this is changed. I will take you to St. Petersburg to see your husband, and to consult with the lawyers upon your case. I hear that I am to be offered the post of Ambassador there, and you and Miss Warden must come and keep house for me at the Embassy."

CHAPTER XVI.

It will be easy enough for the reader to discover that no such person as Lord Silchester was ever accredited Her Majesty's Ambassador at St. Petersburg. It has been the privilege of romance-writers, however, from the earliest times, to exalt and degrade their personages, as it has seemed good unto them. History, itself, indeed, plays pranks of the same kind. Was Guy, the vanquisher of the Danish giant, really Earl of Warwick? They tell us, now, that the story is a corruption of one of the old Scandinavian legends, having to do with

the adventures of the god Thor. What right had Robin Hood to the earldom of Huntingdon? Not much, I am afraid! And yet one does not read with less interest of his daring exploits, of Maid Marian, and his "merry men," clad in their Lincoln green, and of the jovial, lawless life beneath the greenwood tree, for all that; or even because some wiseacres have discovered that the bold outlaw, as he has descended to us, never existed at all, being, like William Tell, of glorious memory, merely an incarnation of the archer of the zodiac, who marked one of the halting-places of the solar divinity upon his journey along the ecliptic!

This story, then, is simply a romance, the characters mythical, the events untrue?

I would like my readers to believe that it is false, as is all true history—true, as is all fabled myth? That it is a blending

together, that is, of fact and fiction, and that, to serve the purposes of the latter, Lord Silchester is now established upon the banks of the Neva as English Ambassador.

We were at the Embassy too, Miss Warden and myself. We had a sitting-room to ourselves, and, during the first few weeks after our arrival, saw very little of the *personnel* of the Embassy, leading a life which was almost entirely secluded.

I had changed, or rather curtailed, my name. I think I have already mentioned that, Lord Silchester having been my godfather, I had been christened "Helen Collingwood." As the name of "Davenant" was no longer mine, and as I still shrank from assuming that of "Crecsolleski," we came to the conclusion that it would be better, pending a more satisfactory arrangement of my affairs, to drop my surname altogether, and to call myself simply "Miss

Helen Collingwood," which, without being in any sense a false name, would serve the double purpose of shrouding my identity, and of seeming to associate me with the family of the Ambassador.

My godfather, in spite of his important diplomatic duties, was continually busying himself in my behalf. His first step was to collect information with respect both to the law of divorce in Russia, as applied to mixed marriages, and also as to how far our union in a Protestant church (Hugo being at the time a Roman Catholic) might have affected the legality of the marriage.

I had not seen my unfortunate husband as yet. I think Lord Silchester dreaded, for both of us, the pain of this interview. He begged me to defer it, at any rate, until he had obtained all the information he sought, lest I might be influenced, upon beholding his melancholy situation, to act in

opposition to my own interests. He had seen the doctor who had charge of the Prince, and had confided to him the true state of affairs. I could have news of Hugo, therefore, whenever I liked, and, in the course of little more than half-an-hour, if need be, I could drive to the doctor's villa. The Ambassador proposed visiting the Prince, first himself, as the bearer of a letter from me, in which I should express my intention of coming to St. Petersburg, and I was to be guided in my future conduct by the manner in which this information was received. At the time of which I am writing, towards the middle of the month of January, the Ambassador had not yet paid Hugo this proposed visit, nor had I been able to find words in which to write the letter in question.

It was evident that my godfather hardly knew what to advise for the best. He

dreaded, under the present painful circumstances, any kind of *rapprochement* between Hugo and myself, which could only have the effect of making our second parting the more harrowing; and yet I could see that he was not altogether in favour of a divorce. Miss Warden was of opinion that he was so attached to me himself, although—as she now admitted—only after a platonic or parental fashion, that he preferred my remaining in my present equivocal position, when he could constitute himself my chief protector, to running the risk of losing me through any change in my circumstances.

One other person in St. Petersburg, besides the doctor of the private lunatic asylum was in our confidence -- the Emperor Alexander himself.

“Everything must be brought to the knowledge of the Czar,” Lord Silchester

had said to me soon after our arrival in Petersburg ; “ once we have obtained His Imperial Majesty’s approval of our conduct, nobody else will have a right to find fault with it. One of the advantages of living under a despotism is, that we are permitted to fly to the autocrat in any social difficulty, and appeal to him as the arbiter of our fate ! ”

My sad case had been brought, almost immediately afterwards, to His Imperial Majesty’s notice, to whom my reasons for wishing to maintain a strict incognito had also been explained. The Ambassador represented me as his god-child, the daughter of very old and intimate friends in England, who were both of them dead. He stated that I was in mourning, now, for my father, and that this, and the melancholy condition of the Prince, my husband, would debar me from going much into society during the

time of my stay in the Russian capital. These communications, it seems, had been very graciously received, and, for a time, everything appeared to go on satisfactorily. I must mention here, however, that we had been somewhat embarrassed, upon our arrival, at finding that Mr. Montagu-Morrison, of whom Lord Silchester had spoken as one of the greatest gossips in the diplomatic service, had arrived before us at the British Embassy. My godfather, knowing of his appointment, was prepared for this, and could only hope that he would not recognise us as the heroines of the adventure with the snake, or that, if he did so, he would not, at any rate, know anything about the painful reason of our sojourn at St. Dalmas de Tende.

As we made no allusion to any previous meeting, but behaved, when presented to him, as though we had never beheld him

before, and as he made no reference to it himself, it was impossible to divine how much he might have known or suspected. We became filled with mistrust of him, however, in consequence of this uncertainty, fancying sometimes, from his manner, that he wished to show us that we were in some sense at his mercy; and as he was a man towards whom we should not have been attracted in any circumstances, we had ended by taking quite a dislike to him.

Lord Silchester, as I have already said, spoke of me as his god-daughter, but somehow it came to be assumed, by the members of the *corps diplomatique*, that I was his niece. I was also described, by way of variation, as his "ward." To these erroneous assumptions I could not object, as the more intimately I was associated with the Ambassador in the minds of the people

by whom we were surrounded, the more natural and proper would they consider it that I should reside beneath his roof.

Mr. Morrison alone, or so we fancied, appeared to be doubtful as to my relationship to His Excellency, the statements as to which, without denying, we had never in any way confirmed.

From the first day of our arrival, he appeared determined to thrust his company upon us, whether we desired it or not, and he was perpetually questioning us and making allusions which, in our ignorance of the extent of his knowledge, we felt to be exceedingly embarrassing. Lord Silchester thought that it was merely an insatiable curiosity which led him to pry into the affairs of his neighbours, whilst vanity induced him to pretend to know more than he really did, and, whilst assuring us that he did not believe there was really much

harm in him, he advised us, on account of these annoying characteristics, to keep him somewhat at a distance. We acted upon this advice accordingly. The gossiping little *attaché* strove to conceal his resentment at our behaviour, but we could not help fearing that we had turned him into a secret foe.

At about the time of which I am writing, that is, after we had been for some three weeks in Petersburg, Lord Silchester came to the conclusion, in consequence of some unpleasant whispers which had reached his ears relating to my position at the Embassy, that these were due a good deal to the retirement and mystery in which I was shrouded, and that it would be better for me to come forward openly, as his god-daughter, and to be presented as such to some of his new acquaintances.

He persuaded me to appear, therefore, at

two formal dinner-parties which were given at the Embassy, at each of which I occupied a seat at the head of the table, to which I was escorted by the guest of the highest rank.

After this, I was generally included in the invitations received by the Ambassador. I made it a rule, however, to decline all such civilities, pleading as an excuse my deep mourning and delicate health.

But now a grand entertainment, a fancy ball, was to be given, in the course of the ensuing month, at the British Embassy, and I was anxiously debating as to whether I should have to appear at it or not. Lord Silchester was greatly in favour of my doing so, whilst I, on the contrary, was as much opposed to the idea. If I had had only my own inclinations to follow, I should have desired to pay my proposed visit to Hugo, to help my godfather with his decorations and invitations for the ball, and then, with

my faithful companion, Miss Warden, to have departed for England before the entertainment in question took place. But then I had other people's feelings to consider besides my own.

To the Ambassador, for instance, my departure at such a moment would be, as I could not fail to perceive, a real disappointment. Miss Warden, too, who had never witnessed an entertainment upon so magnificent a scale, was most anxious that I should remain for it. Lord Silchester's visit to my husband was, from one cause or another, deferred from day to day. The letter preparing him for my coming had never been written, for I found it almost impossible to decide how I ought to express myself, and last, but not least, with every desire to quit St. Petersburg immediately after this proposed visit, I dreaded the idea of returning to England with only Miss

Warden and Mason for escort. Could I not find some one who might be going home in the course of the next fortnight, and who would consent to look after three "unprotected females" upon the journey? These were the questions that were occupying my mind at this time, when I resume the thread of my narrative upon the banks of the Neva.

One afternoon, when Miss Warden and I were in our sitting-room, discussing these matters, we were interrupted by a knock at the door, and a visitor was announced—Mr. Montagu-Morrison; could he speak to us for a few minutes?

Having no excuse ready, he was admitted forthwith.

After taking off his fur coat in the ante-room, he shook hands with us, and then drew up a chair to the stove.

"I hope I'm not trespassing upon your

time," he said apologetically, "but the Turkish Ambassador is with His Excellency, and I did not like to disturb him, and there's a little Italian *attaché* worrying my life out about this forthcoming festivity, wishing to know exactly when it's going to be. I thought you might be able to give me some idea, as these things are generally known to ladies a good while beforehand?"

"You mean the fancy ball?" I asked. "Oh, I don't suppose it will take place for some time! It depends on so many other things. Nothing is settled as yet."

"That's just what I said. I said that nothing was settled, and that I would let him know when it was. It seems that a lady, a friend of his, or the friend of a lady friend—a "Contessa" something—is very anxious to time her arrival in Petersburg so as to come in for this event, and wants

to have plenty of warning beforehand, so that she may think about her costume, I suppose, and invent something that will take us northern barbarians by storm ! ”

We promised Mr. Morrison that we would let him know as soon as the date of the ball was decided upon.

“ I know that Miss Collingwood is entirely in His Excellency’s confidence,” he said, turning to Miss Warden ; “ she will be sure to know the moment that the day is settled.”

His remark, in any other circumstances, would probably have seemed perfectly natural. But now I fancied that I detected a ring of sarcasm in his words, and I felt that I was blushing painfully.

“ I’ll be bound that you two ladies, although you pretend to know so little, have made up your minds long ago as to what you are going to wear ? ” Mr. Morrison went on by-and-by.

"I mean to go as a *duenna*," replied Miss Warden, "if I go at all! I shall wear a dear little thing on my head like a black velvet muffin, with a kind of shaving brush at the top of it, and a long veil. It will be very becoming, I think, and need not be at all expensive."

"And you, Miss Collingwood," asked our visitor, "shall you be very magnificent? Are you going as Cleopatra, or Mary Queen of Scots, or Madame de Pompadour?"

"Why 'Madame de Pompadour'?" I inquired quickly; but, as soon as the words had escaped me, I wished that I had not spoken, and I felt myself changing colour again.

"Oh, only because the dress is so pretty!" he answered, carelessly; "rouge and powder, and patches, and all that! Not that you've any need of such artificial aids to beauty!"

"I'm not sure," I said, "that I shall be able to go to the ball at all. I may be

obliged to leave Petersburg before it takes place. I haven't thought yet about my dress. As you see, I'm in mourning."

"Oh, but you must go to the ball!" he exclaimed, as we fancied, with assumed concern. "One sets aside one's private feelings upon such official occasions! Why, His Excellency himself is in mourning."

"Yes," I answered, absently; "he is in mourning for his father."

"The old Lord Silchester. I remember seeing him years ago in Paris, when his son used to be there. A fine-looking old man. Your grandfather, I presume?"

"My *grandfather*?" I repeated, bewildered. Then, recovering myself, I added quickly, "He was not related to me in any way; nor is this Lord Silchester; he is merely a friend."

"Oh, I fancied that he was your uncle!" remarked Mr. Morrison, with rather a

curious look. "All Petersburg gives you the credit of being very intimately connected with him!"

"All Petersburg is wrong then," I answered, speaking as quietly as I could, but with cheeks that I felt were becoming crimson; "but he is my godfather, and a very dear friend."

Miss Warden came to my rescue, observing my confusion, and inquired of Mr. Montagu Morrison what he intended to wear himself at the fancy ball?

"I haven't quite made up my mind as yet," he answered; "but I think that at a fancy ball in a foreign land the Briton ought always to assume some essentially English *rôle*, with the view of striking terror into the heart of the foreigner. Perhaps I may go as St. George; but it might be difficult to provide oneself with a dragon—and there ought to be a dragon you know,

the part would be nothing without one! Perhaps, however, a big snake would do as well. Something for one to destroy, you know, and trample in the dust with one's heel. I'm rather a good hand at killing snakes!"

"I wish that we could discover how much he really knows!" Miss Warden exclaimed, as soon as our tormentor had departed. "I wonder whether he recognises us as the people he met when he killed that horrid snake, and whether he and his friend stayed on at St. Dalmas during that terrible night?"

"I don't know," I answered; "perhaps we do him an injustice; but I certainly fancy that he wishes to sneer at us and taunt us, and that all the people here at the Embassy seem to look upon us in an evil light. It is time that we should think about returning to England."

CHAPTER XVII.

A CIRCUMSTANCE which tended to strengthen me in this impression was my recollection of the strange behaviour just before this of Captain Dangerfield, the English military *attaché*.

Without describing individually the *personnel* of the Embassy it will be necessary for me to say a few words about this distinguished officer. He was, I should think, about three or four and thirty, a married man, in the horse artillery, who was looked

upon it seems as one of the handsomest men in the British army. When the ladies of St. Petersburg had at first heard this, and that he was so shortly to be introduced into their midst, they all began (to use Mr. Morrison's expression) "to sit up and smooth their tuckers."

But a great disappointment was in store for them. The Captain had arrived accompanied by his wife, a little, dowdy insignificant looking woman (to quote again the words of our gossiping informant), who ruled him nevertheless with a rod of iron, and to add to their discomfiture (according to the same authority) "Providence when turning out such a highly decorative object" had endowed him with certain neutralising characteristics, with the view of setting him upon the same level as ordinary mortals.

He had been "cursed" (Mr. Morrison

told us) "with middle-class prudery, deadly dullness, and an exaggerated notion of the sanctity of the marriage tie;" so that when Mrs. Dangerfield (whose dress and appearance Mr. Morrison was never tired of turning into ridicule) was obliged to leave St. Petersburg, being unable to endure the climate, the Russian syrens found that their chances had not improved, although they had endeavoured by every means to lay siege to the Captain's heart. They were stimulated in their evil designs partly by a feeling of revenge; for Mrs. Dangerfield, having succeeded in retaining the affections of this large, loyal-hearted man, had held her head naturally somewhat high, and so had rendered herself extremely unpopular.

It was not possible, however, to lure the Captain from the path of duty. He wrote to his wife regularly every day, and was

continually sending her home little tokens of his affection in the shape of furs, old silver ornaments, and caviare, by the messenger.

When he found himself alone with any of his female admirers, he talked to them persistently about his wife, or repeated for their benefit the witty sallies of his youngest child. This loyalty upon the Captain's part had exasperated them terribly. They christened him "*l'Anglais impossible*," "*le Bayard bourgeois*," "*le Danger échappé*," (a kind of play upon his name), and had now given him up as utterly hopeless and ridiculous.

All this, which had been told me, no doubt, with the object of rendering Captain Dangerfield contemptible in my eyes, had had the effect of prepossessing me in his favour. I perceived that he was what might be called rather a dull man, and that his

dulness was even increased by his being well-informed, for occasions appropriate to solid and improving conversation did not often occur in the society in which he now moved, and as he was possessed of neither humour nor imagination he did not shine in small talk or repartee. It was impossible to look at his magnificent *physique* without admiration, but in spite of his height, his strength, his well-shaped head and classic features, he was neither sympathetic nor attractive. The fact of his being such a pre-eminently "good creature," too, seemed somehow to render him, to my mind, at least, a little commonplace.

Still, because he happened to be a man with whom I should have found it quite impossible to fall in love, there was no reason why I should not secure him as a friend. He was the very man, indeed, whose

friendship I was anxious to cultivate and for this reason :—

Mrs. Dangerfield—"the little woman," as her husband always called her—had written to say that he must return to England as soon as possible, as she could not exist without him; and, obedient to her commands, he had resigned his post, and was only remaining on at St. Petersburg for the convenience of the Ambassador. As soon as he could be spared, he would depart at once.

Now that my position at the Embassy appeared to me to have become somewhat embarrassing and difficult of explanation, it occurred to me that if I could only become upon sufficiently friendly terms with Captain Dangerfield, this gallant officer—a married man, devoted to his wife, chivalrous and honourable—would be the very person to escort us back to England, and

that my godfather could raise no objection to our travelling under the charge of so exemplary a man. I had said nothing, as yet, to Lord Silchester upon this subject, not wishing to worry him with my plans until I had arranged them in some definite form. I hoped, however, that events would shape themselves in accordance with my desires, and that I should be enabled thus to leave St. Petersburg before the proposed fancy ball.

I scarcely knew why I looked forward to this entertainment with so much apprehension. It was not alone because I might have to assist in doing the honours of it to so many distinguished guests. This idea did not alarm me as much as might have been expected, considering my inexperience in such matters. I disliked the notion of appearing at a ball at all, of course, after all the misery I had gone through; and as

I had met Hugo for the first time at a ball, I felt certain that I should be painfully reminded, by the music and dancing, of the beginning of all my misfortunes. But I was quite prepared for the fact that, unless I made a public avowal of my painful situation, I should have now occasionally to mingle in society, however distasteful this might be to me. There must be some other reason, therefore (I said to myself), which caused me thus to shudder involuntarily at the thought of this approaching entertainment at the British Embassy.

As I have already said, it had been agreed that Lord Silchester should visit Hugo, in the first instance, without me. It seemed a long time before the opportunity for doing this presented itself;—so long that I fancied the Ambassador must be purposely delaying from day to day what he knew could not fail to be painful, for I had become aware,

by this time, how much he shrank from all that was disagreeable and disturbing.

At last, however, when we had been nearly a month in Petersburg, the visit took place. Upon Lord Silchester's return from it he sent for me to his private apartments. I could see at once that he had been deeply moved.

"Are you still resolved to go and see your unhappy husband?" he inquired, after pressing my hand affectionately. I replied that I had come to Russia only with this object, as he well knew, and that after I had seen Hugo, and made him understand that, as long as I lived, I could never believe him to be morally guilty of the crime imputed to him, my mission would be ended, and I should desire to return to England as soon as possible. His brow clouded at this allusion to my return.

"We shall have time to talk about that,"

he remarked, "after you have seen Hugo, and after this ball, at which I shall greatly require your assistance. The Emperor, and other members of the Imperial family, are to be my guests. I am only waiting to fix the day until they have selected the evening upon which they can be present. If, as you seem to imagine, there are any malicious stories afloat respecting you, it is of the highest importance that the ill-natured people who have invented them should be put to confusion, and this end will be attained if you appear at this ball, and help me to receive my guests. As to poor Hugo, will next Thursday suit you to go with me to see him?" It was now Tuesday. I told him that Thursday would suit me perfectly, and accordingly, upon the afternoon of that day, I set out with the Ambassador, bound for Dr. Schumann's villa.

I felt very nervous and agitated upon my

arrival, being quite unable to foresee what effect this interview would produce upon me. Lord Silchester had told me that Hugo seemed but little changed mentally—that he, himself, had always looked upon him as mad, but that he regarded him as no more mad now than he had been when I had seen him for the first time. I should observe a great difference in his appearance, because he now wore a beard, it having been thought imprudent to trust him with a razor, and he had also adopted a peculiar costume, the dress of the followers of some sect who professed to have done for ever with the world. But for this, my godfather said, I should find him the same as before. Nevertheless, I could not help trembling violently when the door of the room opened quietly. It was only the doctor, a courteous intelligent-looking man, who had been duly informed beforehand of our coming. He was the

means of affording me what I could not but regard as a reprieve from some kind of impending torture. The Prince, he said, had appeared much depressed since the visit of His Excellency. He had abandoned the reading and writing from which he had hitherto seemed to derive a melancholy pleasure, and had sat moodily silent with his hands pressed to his forehead. Dr. Schumann said that he could not answer for the effect which this interview might produce upon him. Had I been a mere casual acquaintance, it would have been a different matter. In a word, we were compelled by the doctor's advice to abandon our intention, and postpone our visit to some future day.

During our homeward drive, I remained silent, wrapped in my own thoughts. By the time that we arrived at the Embassy I had come to the conclusion that I must

now remain on in the Russian capital, at any rate until Hugo was allowed to see me, having travelled so far with this object. I hoped with all my heart that I might still depart before the fancy ball, which would have the effect, supposing that I assisted at it, of bringing me so prominently forward. I would inquire of Captain Dangerfield, at once, when he proposed returning home, and beg him to allow us to travel back in his company, and then make the departure of the Captain an excuse for hurrying on our own.

We fell in with Captain Dangerfield upon the following Sunday as we came out of the English church, at which he was a very regular attendant, and I quickened my pace in order that I might walk with him along the English quay, a little in advance of the rest of our party.

I began by asking him what he meant to

wear at the forthcoming ball, saying that I thought—as I really did—that he would look well as a Crusader. He replied, twirling his long fair moustaches rather conceitedly, that a great many people had made the same remark, but that, even supposing that he remained on for the ball, he should not dream of going to the expense of a fancy dress—the “Queen’s uniform” being quite good enough for him. As it was, however, he hoped to get off before it took place. I informed him that I, too, proposed returning to England very shortly, that I dreaded making the journey with only Miss Warden and my maid, and I then asked him whether he would be kind enough, supposing the time happened to fit in conveniently, to allow us to place ourselves under his care ?

He seemed to be much surprised to hear of my intended departure, but said that he

should be proud and pleased to escort us home, that he was a capital hand at looking after ladies, having "gone through his training," and that he felt certain "Mrs. D." would give him an excellent character in this respect. He would let me know, at once, as soon as the day of his departure was fixed; all he knew, at present, was that he "meant to be off before the ball." I begged that he would say nothing, as yet, to the Ambassador upon the subject of my request, as I wished to be the first to speak to him about it. He promised that he would do as I wished, and our conversation ended, as I thought, very satisfactorily.

Some days afterwards, as I was returning from a drive, I met Captain Dangerfield coming out of the room where Lord Silchester habitually transacted his official business. He bowed, in rather a distant manner, as I fancied, and passed me hur-

riedly. I was a little surprised that he should not have stopped and made some allusion to his journey home. After that I had neither seen nor heard from him again, but, upon the evening preceding the day of which I am writing, I learnt, quite accidentally, that he was starting immediately for England. It would have been quite impossible for us to get ready now in time to accompany him. I was quite at a loss to imagine what could have prevented him from informing us of the day of his departure !

But now, upon this particular day, immediately after Mr. Montagu-Morrison had left us, I fancied that I perceived Captain Dangerfield's motive. He had been prejudiced against me, probably, by the mischief-making little man who had just paid us a visit, and who, wishing to be supposed to know everything about everybody, had, no

doubt, confided to the military *attaché* his suspicions regarding me. Captain Dangerfield, a respectable married man, did not wish to travel back to England in company with an adventuress. He was afraid of what "the little woman" might say, who "ruled him with a rod of iron," and so he had formed the project of escaping by flight from my importunities! I felt indignant, outraged, humiliated; I was upon the point of rushing at once into the presence of the Ambassador in order to entreat him to publish abroad the particulars of my marriage without any further delay.

Whilst I was in this uncomfortable frame of mind, Mr. Montagu-Morrison sent in his card for the second time. He had scribbled the following words upon it in pencil: "My persecutor wishes to know whether ball is to be *masqué et costumé*? Forgot to ask about the *masqué*."

Mr. Morrison was waiting in the vestibule which opened from our sitting-room, his messenger said. In spite of my growing mistrust I went out to speak to him there, so as to save the trouble of writing.

“Ten thousand pardons, my dear Miss Collingwood!” he said; “but it seems that I stupidly left out the most important part of my message.”

I told him that, as far as I knew at present, dominos would be permissible, but that I had heard His Excellency say that he hoped they would be the exception rather than the rule, as otherwise the effect of the ball would be spoilt; besides which, “masks” were apt sometimes to assume a freedom of speech and manner which might not be altogether becoming in the presence of the Royal and Imperial guests who were expected.

"Quite so!" he answered, somewhat sarcastically, as I fancied. "Above all things, let us observe *les convenances*! I must ask you to pardon me for troubling you again, but His Excellency has gone to his room, and has left orders that he does not wish to be disturbed."

But just then, as ill-luck would have it, one of the Ambassador's English footmen presented himself at the door which communicated with the outer passage.

"If you please, miss," he said, "His Excellency would be much obliged to you if you would be kind enough to go to him at once in his sitting-room."

Because of what I imagined that my visitor might think, I was conscious that I blushed provokingly. After bowing to him, however, with what I intended for a look of defiance, I followed the servant at once.

I found Lord Silchester in a small room which he had fitted up as a study.

"Look here, Helen," he began, as soon as the servant had closed the door upon us. "What in the world am I to do? Advise me with your woman's wit, for Heaven's sake! Dangerfield, as you may have heard, started off for England this morning . . ."

"Started for England this morning!" I repeated, wounded at the Captain's faithlessness. "Has Captain Dangerfield really started already?"

"Yes, dear, he is gone," answered Lord Silchester, looking a little surprised at my vehemence; "but why his departure should affect you I am at a loss to imagine! Dangerfield was a most excellent, worthy, creature, and clever too, after a fashion, but he didn't get on with foreigners. He's much more suited to the drudgery of the War Office, and I hope he may succeed in

getting something there equal to his deserts. It's not of him, however, that I have to speak; but this letter has just come from Tom Collingwood, my Guardsman nephew, to say that his great friend, Courtenay Davenant, has applied to the F. O. for Dangerfield's place, and begging me to back his application! What am I to do in this dilemma? I think very highly of him; he is the very man, of all others, for the place, and I've always promised, whenever it was in my power, to give him a helping hand. Under ordinary circumstances I should telegraph to him to come out here at once!"

"And *now*," I asked, my heart, I knew not wherefore, giving a little bound, "what do you propose to do?"

"I fancied that his coming here would annoy you—that you might feel compelled to announce your marriage before you would

otherwise have done so ; you have generally spoken of him with so much dislike."

"How could his coming here now possibly influence my plans?" I asked, experiencing a sudden sensation of interest and excitement. I felt a desire to behold, from the vantage-ground afforded me by my incognito, the man I had for so long persisted in regarding as an adversary.

"Pray do not prevent him from coming!" I exclaimed; "and pray go on calling me 'Miss Collingwood' whilst he is here. If he knew who I was, I should feel shy and miserable in his presence, because, as you know, there was once some question of our marriage; but as 'Miss Collingwood,' your 'ward,' it would interest me to see him and talk to him, and find out what he was like. He might sometimes speak to me about his cousin Nelly!"

"Might not this be a little dangerous,

dear?" said the Ambassador, looking grave.

"In what way 'dangerous'?" I asked, fired now with something akin to my old spirit of adventure. "Courtenay has never seen me since I was quite a little girl in a white frock and coral necklace! He was only an Eton boy at the time; he would never recognise me again!"

I remembered my white frock and coral necklace quite well, and could recall the black kid gloves which my cousin had worn, and the mark they had made upon his nose.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking about that!" His Excellency answered. "There could be no danger in a recognition, as matters could soon be satisfactorily explained. I was thinking of another kind of danger altogether! You are a beautiful woman, tied to an unfortunate semi-lunatic. Courtenay

Davenant is a very attractive man. I was thinking that, thrown together as you probably will be, once he is established here, there would be some danger of this contact ending as it usually does end, in such cases, and that you might get to care for one another."

"To 'care for one another'!" I repeated, scornfully. "Courtenay Davenant and I! How little you know what I feel about that man! Married or single, he is the very last person in the world that I should ever be likely to fall in love with!"

The Ambassador heard my vehement words with an expression such as the experienced are wont to assume whilst rash young people are making their headlong intemperate asseverations. And then, for very scorn at the bare absurdity of the notion which had been suggested, I laughed aloud!

I wonder what manner of high power it is—whether benevolent or malignant—that, listening to such rash laughter, seems so often to arrange that it shall, some day, be turned to weeping and gnashing of teeth?

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